

HELL'S PLAYGROUND

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IDA VERA SIMONTON

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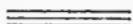
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HELL'S PLAYGROUND

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BY

IDA VERA SIMONTON



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To the Memory of a Perfect Mother,
this, my first book is dedicated—
would it were more worthy!

I. V. S.

New York, July, 1912

IN EXPLANATION

HELL'S PLAYGROUND is written *not* for the idly curious, the thrill-hunters, the *gourmets* of sensationalism, but for the thoughtful, the students of history and psychology, the disectors of life, the truth-seekers.

The story has to do with primal conditions: savages and savagery. It lacks the niceties and embroideries and perfumes of civilization; it is crude and shocking, essentially so. It is a record of the debauching life of the African tropics; the methods of government; the duties and opportunities of the white trader; the nature of the negro savages; the almost hopeless problems of colonization and Christianization; and the demoralization which follows the unnatural imposition of the rule of one race over another.

For centuries the West Coast of Africa has been the dumping ground for Europe's undesirables and so unhealthy is the climate that life is one continuous battle for existence. The best class of white men are not attracted to it. The average white trader and government official, freed from all restraint, deprived of the society of white women and the commonest things to which civilization has accustomed them, breathing the atmosphere of sameness, stagnation and sensuality, early shed the veneer of civilization. They revel in tyranny, licentiousness and brutality; they are a law unto themselves: a law of menace and destruction; they out-savage the very savage.

To some readers the author's treatment of missions and

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missionaries may seem harsh, but she has only penned conditions as she found them. She lived among missionaries of all denominations, including the Mohammedans and the Copts. No one knows better than she how noble and heroic are these laborers in savage Africa's unproductive vineyard. They have preached and prayed, taught and encouraged under the most unhealthy and depressing and discouraging conditions; they have pressed on and ever on where even greed for wealth and territory has turned back discouraged; and many of them have laid down their very lives for their savage charges — for the death toll has been, is, and ever will be, a heavy one. The author also knows that the little transient good effected by the white missionaries in no way compensates for their sufferings, deprivations and deaths! Such noble men and women are needed nearer home, where the bulb of Christianity is indigenous and needs only care and attention to cause it to flower bountifully.

A Polar bear has as much need of a sealskin sack to keep him warm as has an African savage of the raiment made for him by well-meaning, God-serving and God-fearing white women. Neither does the savage need houses to shelter him nor cultivated products to nourish him. Lavish nature and torrid heat have made him an improvident animal, sensual and lazy. He is what he is from the very beginning of time. His native superstitions, beliefs, abominable practices and nudity are as much a part of him as are his peculiar odor, his black skin and his kinky hair. They are there to stay, and the negro savage is best let alone. In the bush the realities are respected; at the mission a farce is innocently played: a farce so far as any lasting benefit to the savage accrues, but a tragedy where the health and lives of their white teachers are concerned.

The English, the greatest colonizers in the world, have demonstrated in their African possessions that to respect

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native superstitions and customs is the only way to effectively control the natives and secure from them the boundless wealth of their great country. The so-called civilized, Christianized savage is as subtle as a Brahmin and as much to be feared. The attempt to live on brotherly terms with the negro is demoralizing to the negro. Highly imitative, he takes on all the vices of the white man and none of his virtues. He returns to his bush town and he disseminates the bad, never the good. There are some lovable traits in the true bush negro, but none at all in the so-called civilized creature.

Unhealthy and demoralizing as the West Coast of Africa is, from the time of the Carthaginians and Phœnicians, 500 B. C., it has been eagerly frequented by traders in search of slaves and wealth. In the latter part of the 14th Century, the Portuguese discovered the Congo, one of the great rivers of the world. They rounded Good Hope and settled Natal on the southeast coast. In the 18th Century, England alone took 3,000,000 slaves from these West Coast ports, and many of them were brought to America. They are the forebears of our southern negroes. In addition to the above number of slaves, 2,500,000 more were lost either in the treacherous surf, which girds Africa like a wall, or died from exposure and disease. Liberia is also on this coast and so is the French Congo, wherein Paul du Chaillu discovered that wonderful anthropoid, the gorilla. Quite recently, Livingstone and Stanley sailed this West Coast, and just a little over one year ago, for the first time in the history of American commerce, a trading ship sailed direct from New York to secure some of its trade for which Europeans have fought for centuries. The flag followed the trader out there and the unhealthy traffic in human flesh was succeeded by the quest for the commodities necessary to civilization in which the Dark Continent abounds.

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After all, we Americans have some link with HELL'S PLAYGROUND, and, revolting and repellent though its life may be, to researchers and students that which *is* is ever interesting and instructing.

IDA VERA SIMONTON.

New York City, August, 1912.

HELL'S PLAYGROUND

CHAPTER I

OFF the west coast of Africa a terrific tornado raged. Forked lightning rent night's Stygian veil, and, with uncanny brilliancy, uncovered yawning, heaving depths beneath and angry heavens above; rain descended in straight, destructive streams like shrapnel from an exhaustless reservoir; a fog siren moaned like a lost soul, and, now and then as though escaping from Pluto's realm, came the timid, ghost-like tinkle of a half-submerged bell.

In treacherous seas the *Nigeria* tossed with her engines slowed down; waves like huge batteries hammered her bow, drenched her deserted decks and threatened to pound her to pieces; malignant, warring winds shrieked through her rigging; furled canvases tugged at fastenings; oil bags were wrenched from bow and sides and hurled vindictively through turbulent space. Aloft, the lookout clung for his life, his eyes, keen as gimlets, attempting to bore night's opaque wall; lashed to his scanty foothold and drenched by furious seas the quartermaster cast the lead and in deep-throated tones sang out the soundings. From the bridge, through the growling of thunder, the shrieking of winds and the bombardment of rain and seas, came the skipper's commands in sharp, crisp sentences.

Hurried feet crossed slippery decks; nimble figures climbed swaying ladders; lives were risked without fear or hesitation. Every man of the crew was at work or else stood by for orders. The fight was an unequal one: untrammelled Nature against man's confined resources.

With the grip of a Titan and jaws hard set, the man at the wheel forced the *Nigeria*'s prow into the very teeth of the tornado and battled to hold her course. Winds, seas and rain attacked at the same time and from all directions, causing the steamer to groan from stem to stern as, with timbers and bolts a-quiver, she plunged into abysmal depths until the ocean's very bed seemed reached, then, like some huge leviathan, she shook her sides, and *up, up, up* she crawled to mountainous heights, only to be repulsed again and again by the fury of rampant Nature!

Below, ports and doors were closed and securely fastened. Not a soul slept. Along a narrow alleyway, a dark-robed priest stumbled back and forth, his long fingers caressing his beads, his pale lips tightly compressed. In such moments appeals are mute.

In a stuffy, inside cabin, the body of a young nun, and the only woman aboard, rolled to and fro in *tempo* with the ship's mad plunging. Of all those on that storm-tossed, floating world, she alone was at rest; death had mercifully silenced mortal terror and eased physical pain.

But different was the scene in the smoking room: neither quiet nor repose was there. Smoke from burning tobaccos of many kinds, odors from spirits, fresh and stale; the distinctive smells of human beings packed into small, ill-ventilated space added distressingly to an

already surcharged and depressed atmosphere ; and each man, according to his nature, did his best to appear indifferent to Nature's tirade. In groups they were, none sat alone ; none had that courage, for in proximity there is comfort. Glass after glass of scorching liquors were drained for the false courage therein ; other men denied themselves lest shaking fingers attest their nervousness ; others attempted games of chance, despite scattering chips and falling cards ; still others lied viciously of dangers braved and lived through ; each and every man groped for courage in self-deception.

Old coasters sat deep in their chairs, their feet far apart and planted firmly on the floor. Toying with pegs of brandy and soda, they pretended to revel in the night's horrors and added to them by their loud-mouthed conversation, which, with ghoulish glee, was fashioned to torture the first-time-out men.

“ ‘Twas in just such a storm as this that the *Hélène Woermann* went down,” said Longworthy, nonchalantly. “ Men were drowned like rats in a flooded gutter — not a soul left to —”

“ She floundered at night,” cut in Haywood, “ but how about that French steamer that only two months ago went down right off here in broad daylight and on as fine a day as you’d want to see? ”

“ That’s so,” drawled old Wallace. “ It don’t matter whether it’s night or day, ships just have to go down — they can’t help themselves — every mile of this bally west coast’s marked with wrecks and I wouldn’t be surprised if we went down any minute.”

There was silence among the tenderfeet ; a silence of fear, of curiosity to know the worst.

“ Gimme my choice,” opined Boynton, “ and it’s quick slide down the neck of a shark rather than a shallow hole in the infernal bush where beastly vultures’ll dig me out and make merry over me carcass.”

“ Me too,” cried Haywood and Longworthy in chorus.

“ Speaking of vultures reminds me of Jimsy Craig,” recalled Wallace. “ He preferred the rusty-razor route to a slow cash-in with vultures setting outside waiting for his carcass — but the vultures got him anyway. Poor Jimsy !”

“ Steward! Brandy, neat!”

It was Cartwright, a tenderfoot, who spoke. His voice was thin, painfully so.

“ Brandy reminds me of LaRue,” remarked Longworthy, lightly as though he were recalling a pleasant event. “ He swore he’d never die sober. He kept his oath. Tornado like this. Lightning like flames from hell. One took a fancy to rum-soaked LaRue. Quick combustion. Finish! ”

“ Yes, and ’twas on just such a night as this, with all hell let loose,” began old Wallace in his slow, irritating drawl, when Kingsford interrupted:

“ Shut up, damn you, shut up! Ever since Liverpool you’ve done nothing but dig up moth-eaten horrors fit only for retailing in hell! We grant you the climate’s notoriously bad, the natives ain’t hail-fellows-well-met; and because we’re alive at sundown’s no reason we’ll see sunrise, but there’s a time to let up and it’s come now! ”

“ Yes, it’s come now,” seconded Cartwright. “ If we’ve got to go to-night, let our last moments be as

pleasant as possible. No use swallowing more agony than we have to."

"Fine soldiers of fortune you chaps are," Longworthy taunted. "We're off Hell's Playground; get into the game, you'll have a better chance; come on: laugh, drink, be merry, to-morrow belongs to no man."

As though to corroborate his words, the *Nigeria* made a deeper plunge, causing men to clutch at iron-fastened tables to keep their equilibrium, while lightning flashed through the room in incessant streams, fiend-driven rain became more insistent, and thunder growled nearer, nearer!

Kingsford forced himself to his feet; Longworthy's taunt loaned power to his voice, and, holding his glass aloft, he cried:

"Up, everybody! Let's drink to Hell's Playground; may the devil do his damnedest, but not before we've had a go at Africa's voluptuous daughters and had a run for our money."

A pandemonium of hysteria followed as strained nerves sought relief before impending annihilation. Men were on their feet cursing madly, vehemently, venomously, all save one and he kept his chair, his glass remained untouched on the table; his eyes were looking through ports whose curtains were as naught against the insistence of the hissing lightning. The play of the elements fascinated him. He had never before witnessed such a boisterous, tropical night, such a tirade of Nature upon so grand and terrible a scale.

Kingsford was stung to renewed resentment.

"What's the matter with *you*, the *Honorable* Cecil Huntingdon," he demanded, in a shrill, sarcastic staccato.

"Afraid to drink to truth? Better swim back to England and mother; Hell's Playground is no place for nincompoops!"

He emphasized the last word and its syllables came slowly, derisively.

Like a flash, Huntingdon was on his feet. His eyes blazed dangerously and his young, lithe, athletic form was tense for action.

"He's drunk, Huntingdon, don't mind him," assuaged Haywood, placing himself between the two men.

"Drunk," shrieked Kingsford, losing all control of himself. "I'm no more drunk than the rest of you. This bally aristocrat's on me nerves. He belongs at Mamma's tea-table."

With a spring, Huntingdon was upon Kingsford; he snapped Kingsford's jaws shut and commanded in a low, vibrant voice, which stewards hastened to obey:

"Take the fellow below and lock him in!"

Fighting and kicking viciously and cursing Huntingdon roundly, Kingsford was unceremoniously led below.

Silence followed his exit.

The artillery of the heavens was immediately overhead; the thunder was deafening; like fingers of live devils lightning played on this man and then on that; winds rose higher and higher; the fury of the seas increased, and on all sides the water gurgled like demons hungry for prey.

On the after-deck something gave way and there followed a rending, a groaning, as though the *Nigeria's* very vitals were being forced apart!

Eyes of men met!

Instinctively there was a drawing together, a feeling of oneness, of common peril!

Stripped was each man of his mask!

Breathing was difficult!

Pretense no longer supportable!

Pipes and cigars went out!

Excruciating silence reigned!

There came terrific blasts as though overhead worlds were exploding!

For a second the *Nigeria* poised in mid-air as though to resist the perils besieging her, then, punished for her audacity, she was dragged violently *down, down, down!*

Glasses and bottles spilled their contents and toppled to the floor!

Money, chips, cards, followed in quick succession. Back and forth they rolled on the floor with nerve-destroying clatter!

Men, hollow-eyed and nerveless, held their breath and waited; waited helpless, inert; a hell of hells horrible in its intensity!

In the compass of seconds was crowded a century of agony.

“*Like rats in a flooded gutter* — that’s the way they would perish!” so said the old coasters, the men who knew!

The imperiled were going to pieces under that awful menace! when suddenly a cry cut the air like steel plunged into molten metal. It was one word, only one: that of MOTHER! and it was wrung from a boyish throat.

Its terror, finality, petition for aid, were agonizing, yet it eased the insufferable tension.

Unmindful of the plunging ship, Huntingdon leaped to the boy's side and grasped his shoulders.

"It's pretty rough, old man, I know. But Hains has the ship's nose right in the teeth of it. That's the way *he* fights. Let's face it that way, you and I together, old chap, you and I together!"

Sincere, spontaneous were Huntingdon's words; courageous his bearing, comforting his manner. Men were dragged from the very depths of physical fear.

Haywood squared his shoulders and pulled down the coat of his uniform. He was again a soldier, an empire builder, fearless and brave.

Stifling, hot, though the room was, Wallace tightly buttoned up his coat. He, too, was ready!

Longworthy's thoughts were not pleasant, if twitching lips and wrinkled brows speak true, but suddenly, his features grew rigid, he sat back in his chair, grasped its arms, and was ready!

Boynton, unconscious of his actions, opened a jack-knife and commenced to whittle the stem of his pipe; then, conscious, he dropped knife and pipe, sat back, and waited.

The four old coasters; Huntingdon, the tenderfoot, and Hertford, the boy, were grouped together, their faces towards the bow!

Suddenly Cartwright joined them.

A look, just one, passed swiftly from eye to eye.

Strong men were confessed and cowards were betrayed!

Cowards lay prone upon the floor, faces hidden, fingers stuffed in ears.

Knees long unaccustomed to supplication's bow now

bent in abject terror! Lips unused to pray tried to fashion petitions to the Most-High!

The *Nigeria* pitched and plunged, quicker and shorter, as a drowning thing in her death throes!

With an unearthly cry a steward collapsed on a table, then tumbled hard to the floor! His cheek was split open, blood deluged his white coat.

But men saw naught, heard naught but their own thoughts.

Acts which the dead past seemed to have buried sprang into magnified existence.

Hidden crimes cried aloud, and good deeds were silent. Death, the relentless, the revealer, stalked abroad. Men saw themselves as they were, loathsome creatures from which their own natures recoiled.

Women trooped by, one by one: a mother; a sister; a wife; a sweetheart; a toy of the moment; women of all kinds; a world of them, accusing, mocking, comforting!

When life's forces were stretched to their fullest and the tension was at breaking point, an unusually sharp explosion overhead was followed by others in quick succession, receding farther and farther away and diminishing in intensity until the heavens reverberated with what seemed random shots let go from rapidly-retreating cannon; the lightning was not so vivid, nor quick, nor near, and the wind grew less wild!

A comparative calm reigned above, while the sea continued to pound and menace, and the ship plunged and rocked, plunged and rocked!

Wallace removed his cap and mopped the sweat from his brow.

Cartright sat down.

Huntingdon released the boy.

Haywood undid his high military collar.

Boynton and Longworthy mechanically stooped and picked up cards and chips.

Cowards uncovered their heads.

Crouching men scrambled to their feet.

Fitful came the lightning flashes; the thunder was spasmodic and faint in the distant heavens, when Boynton spoke:

“Palaver set. West coast tornadoes always steal off like that after scaring human beings to death. We'll plunge and pitch for hours yet, but I'll gamble on our skipper. He's Irish and luck's always with the Irish — when it ain't forinst them.”

“Here's to Hains,” cried Wallace. “May God bless 'im and the divvil ne'er scorch the hair on his hide.”

The game of life was again taken up.

Cowards became brave and strong men assumed carelessness. But moods were softer, less vehement; less positive were acts and words; the air was still surcharged with death's menace.

“A west coast tornado's like passion, the harlot, who masquerades under the name of love,” declared Haywood. “Hell's flame while it lasts, then — I say, Steward, now we *will* have a drink. No alloys; straight pegs, brandy?”

Every head inclined favorably. And when the drinks were served, old Wallace drawled:

“Yes, this coast's got a peculiar brand of everything: climate, diseases, white men, justice, women and slander. They'll greet us to-morrow at Sierra Leone.”

"And Sierra Leone's my port," sighed Boynton.

Silence fell, and, one by one, men stole off to bed. The horrors of the night killed all enthusiasm natural before the first port of a long sea voyage, and the croaking of the old coasters had left tenderfeet dubious whether or not they cared to go ashore before their destinations were reached.

Haywood and Longworthy were alone, having a night-cap. The conversation was of the tornado lived through and the actions of the different men.

"I tell you, Longworthy, when death beckons, every man's cards are down on the table and you get the color of his soul. Gad, didn't the blood of Huntingdon's illustrious and noble ancestors flare up gloriously! He ought to be in the army —"

"There's some scandal why he isn't," interrupted Longworthy, the commoner, the man of trade. "I've traveled this coast too many times and lived Africa's life too long to be fooled. He's the black sheep of the family all right and he's sent out here for the climate to make quick work of. A pretty tale they tell! Betrothed to Lady Marjorie, old Lord Grahame's daughter, poor and proud the whole pack o' them, and this chap coming out here to Hell's Playground to make his own pile! That sounds romantic, but it don't hide the truth from me. You know as well as I do that this west coast has been for years the dumping ground for Europe's undesirables, and this Huntingdon's one of them. The like of him to engage in trade!" and Longworthy's contemptuous sneer was pronounced. "He don't know any more about trade than —"

"You do about gentlemen," snapped Haywood, the

soldier and man of good breeding. "Peers are going into trade daily — they've got to, and Cecil Huntingdon, the youngest son of Lord Bedford — his mother, you know is the Duke of Granville's daughter — shows progression and independence to break away from polo, bridge and the tiresome but gay life of the King's very set and come out to rough it and wrestle wealth from the great African forests. I admire his grit and no man can insult him in my presence!"

"Well, there's one consolation. Hell's Playground isn't any respecter of pedigree. If the climate don't get Huntingdon, the *mammies* will," and Longworthy chortled sardonically. "A full-blooded, young chap like him can no more live without women than I can exist without air to breathe. The first thing he'll do will be to set up a harem."

"I hope not," and Haywood sighed reminiscently and mournfully.

"Gad, Haywood, you're not going to turn sky pilot and warn tenderfeet against the ladies of color. I thought you were a soldier."

Longworthy's sneer killed the gentle in Haywood, and he cried :

"You're right, Longworthy, Huntingdon's blonde beauty'll play havoc with the *mammies*, and his tall stature, kingly bearing and natural dignity'll win half his battle in trade. The savages will kotow to him on sight and if he'll not get in too deep with the ladies, he stands a pretty good fighting chance of making his pile and marrying the Lady Marjorie. Gad, Longworthy, I'm glad Sierra Leone's at hand. These thirteen days and nights have been agony to me. I couldn't stand it

another day. I'm anxious to see the *Yorubas* Captain Collingwood left with Morrison. I'll take one; you can have the other, if she'll suit."

"She'll suit all right. Collingwood's an epicure where women are concerned and what's good enough for him is good enough for yours truly all right. The bally ship's on me nerves, too, and a bit of women's society'll be welcome after the abstemious voyage of the ship, eh, old chap?"

Haywood laughed amorously and ordered another drink.

CHAPTER II

IN his cabin, Huntingdon pulled at his calabash pipe. He was unconscious of the heat, the pounding of the sea, the tossing of the ship. His thoughts were of the fast-moving events of the past three months. What a battle royal he had with his imperious mother to get her consent to his entering trade; then, it was only gained by his agreeing to pose before the world as off on a long hunting trip to Africa for big game.

“To hunt,” the Lady Bedford said, “is the pastime of kings, but were the world to know that a son of mine was engaged in plebeian trade, our noble forbears would leave their graves and come to torture me. Your ancestors were gentlemen, Cecil dear; they never earned a shilling in their lives!”

But Huntingdon was tired of money lenders and sick of the efforts made by his mother to keep going in the world into which they were born. His oldest brother, and heir to the title, had married for wealth, a woman older than himself and one he respected but did not love. Huntingdon’s *fiancée*, the Lady Marjorie, was, like Huntingdon, long on mortgaged estates and short of cash. He loved her deeply and truly, too deeply and truly to ask her to share poverty and pretense with him. She was worth winning, worth working for, worth throwing over ancestral traditions for. It is true he shrank from trade at home, but Africa was so far away he would be

spared the eye-drooping and the shoulder-shrugs of his noble relatives and friends. He was not yet strong enough to brave them. It was only his great love for Marjorie that had recently made a man of him, that fired the ambition to dare, to do, to create for himself — and her. He appreciated the pain and humiliation he caused his mother by his decision to enter trade. His mother had made a girl of him because daughters were denied her. She would be lonesome without him, for his father, Lord Bedford, hated bridge and drawing-rooms, teas and bazaars, and, save where court etiquette demanded it, he never accompanied his lady.

But what a brick the *mater* was after all! She not only fitted him out properly for a three-years' stay in Africa, but had bade him go forth and conquer!

The influence of his father secured for him a position for one year as trader with the British firm of John Holt & Company at Cape Lopez in the *Congo Français*, just under the equator. The salary was less than he was wont to throw away in tips, but it was rich in what he needed most and must have: experience. He would come in direct touch with the natives; he would learn barter and sale and the values of native products; he would study the business from the ground up. After his year of apprenticeship, he would branch out a trader on his own account, his father having promised if he made good in that one year, to get together sufficient capital to float an independent trading company of which he, Cecil, was to be the head. Trading houses established on the coast for upwards of one hundred and fifty years would have to be competed with, but the country was so rich in products necessary to civilization that a new company,

properly financed and managed, could not but reap vast profits.

In consulting with Mr. Holt in Liverpool, Huntingdon was told the truth about his berth: the monotonous, isolated life; the unhealthy climatic conditions; the treachery of the natives. But Huntingdon's loins were girded for a fight, and obstacles to be combated, only whetted his determination to succeed.

In his two years as an independent trader he expected to lay the foundation of a fortune sufficient for him to marry upon. After his marriage, he would return to Africa only periodically to look after his interests and to increase his holdings. He would put first class men in local charge, and in ten years, or perhaps a less time, he would have an income large enough to sustain Marjorie and himself in the state befitting their birth.

Mighty, indeed, were his plans for a tenderfoot, but youth and inexperience are confident and brave — only graybeards draw back and hesitate.

The long voyage out,— which the old coasters had designated as thirteen days and nights of almost unendurable torture and monotony,— was of absorbing interest to Huntingdon. Worlds were revealed to him of whose existence he had never even dreamed. The ship was small; the company a motley one; not at all the usual sort found aboard an ocean liner. Men were of high and low degree; others scarce knew their names, or else hid their true ones under an euphonious *sobriquet*. Each man was for himself, each was a soldier of fortune out to try his luck on the notorious west coast of Africa.

That coast and to-morrow were at hand. Hunting-

don turned to meet them. He flung wide his port and gazed into the night.

The storm had passed.

The heavens were a blue-black velvet canopy studded with diamonds of fiery brilliancy. There was no moon, and in the offing lay Africa, silent, mysterious and secretive!

Huntingdon tried to pierce the blurred coast line. But no definite shape formed. All was shadowy, elusive, like Africa's early history — a matter of conjecture, a myth, yet, withal, terribly real.

As he mused, blue-black night faded; one by one the stars silently made way for a blue dream-world out of which the continent of Africa was born and took definite shape; then, with a suddenness that startled, final shadows disappeared before the gentle caress of rosy-fingered dawn; sunbeams danced on silver-crested waves which but a few hours since were ridden by demons of the deep, and revealed was Africa, no longer dark and mysterious, but sun-flooded and enticing!

After leagues and leagues of monotonous sea level and limitless sky, Sierra Leone arose from the sea's very rim a mountain of surpassing beauty. The arid sunlight played upon it with startling brilliancy, revealing tree-smothered heights embowered in effervescent vegetation and efflorescent flowers, and throwing into bold relief the sun-scorched, sandy wharfs and the crooked, winding streets of Freetown; the long, red-tin-roofed factories and white houses of the Europeans, and the mud huts of the natives.

And Sierra Leone — Iron Mountain — smiled a welcome. Sierra Leone which centuries before Christ scared

off Hannibal, the Carthaginian, and centuries later sent the Portuguese away in terror by the roaring of its winds!

How harmless Africa appeared in the brilliant sunlight, clothed in nature's most fetching garb — eternal summer.

Huntingdon was thrilled through and through. Whistling blithely he made his toilet; he clothed himself in immaculate white; he was anxious to set foot on the land from which he would compel wealth; to explore a British colony at first hand; and, above all, to stretch his limbs in exercise. His active temperament had chafed against the confinement of the ship. But the first long leg of the journey was over, from now on ports were more frequent and at every one he determined to go ashore.

CHAPTER III

HUNTINGDON was the first white man on deck. Natives in dug-outs surrounded the steamer and, begging coins, dived into the water after them, to come up smiling, the coin held between their gleaming teeth. Such rapid, accurate diving Huntingdon had never before witnessed, and he was only too glad to empty his pockets of loose change.

Up the *Nigeria's* ladders climbed the most perfect specimens of black humanity Huntingdon ever gazed upon. They were the noted *Krus*, who are the backbone of the white man's trade in Africa. Clothed in singlet and loin cloths, or only the latter, each man was a Hercules, and Huntingdon watched them dexterously unload the cargo for Freetown.

With Longworthy and Haywood, Huntingdon went ashore. Freetown, the Port Saïd of the west coast, and one of the most infamous slaving ports that has passed into history, interested him keenly and surprised him mightily. He expected tropical dreariness; he found the bustle and activity of Europe. The scene was un-African to the highest degree; ships were unloading and loading, coaling, and being overhauled; trained black troops were going aboard transports; raw recruits were being taken therefrom; great cranes and dredges were at work, and on the beach were cosmopolitan crowds, speaking divers tongues. There seemed ev-

ery civilization and every want of it. Dressed-up Europeans and Asiatics elbowed almost nude bush negroes. Arabs, Berbers and Mohammedan negroes were picturesque in turban and *burnouse*; Turks and Persians in baggy trousers, broad, brilliant silk sashes and the *fez*; white women were conspicuous by their absence and white men by their deathly pallor, their languor and their simple dress of white duck or khaki.

Nude negroes Huntingdon expected nor was he offended at first sight of them, but the dressed-up variety seemed members of a grotesque minstrel show gotten up for the white man's amusement. One couple was especially mirth-producing and yet utterly unconscious of it. The woman weighed at least three hundred pounds and was garbed in a loose mother-hubbard made of print goods of flaming purple covered with a bold design of luridly colored peacocks. Her dress stood out like a balloon over stiffly-starched, white embroidered petticoats; conspicuously displayed were ankles like a Percheron's, fat, ugly legs, salmon pink stockings, and broad, flat feet forced into tan European shoes with bursted sides. On her high, conical-shaped head with its mass of woolly hair was perched a bit of a black straw sailor hat; she reeked to high heaven of trade perfume and she was literally loaded with near-gold European jewelry. She smiled broadly at Huntingdon, and, through the cavity once occupied by two front teeth, she lisped in English in a musical voice:

“Good day to you, master.”

Longworthy guffawed gleefully and nudging Haywood in the ribs, he cried:

“Didn't I tell you the tenderfoot had us all skinned

on *mammy palaver*. G'wan, Huntingdon, follow her up! She could be worse, but not much!"

The companion of the Sierra Leone *mammy* was a pewee of a man, thin, old and wrinkled. He didn't weigh one hundred pounds and he wore a cast-off dress coat of a white man over a pair of red- and blue-striped Turkish trousers. Coat and trousers were too large for him. His arms were lost in the long sleeves of the coat, its tails swept the ground, and its lapels were thrown back, completely hiding his shoulders and exposing a chest covered with tribal marks. The trousers were turned back above his knees from whence they drooped disconsolately and would have dragged on the ground save for something which supported them under the fold.

Another *mammy*, in addition to her mother-hubbard and many underskirts, wore tightly wound about her fat hips a broad cotton scarf of Turkey red with huge yellow polka dots. Emphasized were her enormous hips. She did not walk; she just edged forward in sections like a huge jellyfish.

"*Opéra bouffe* with all its trimmings," Huntingdon remarked, thoroughly amused, when he abruptly stopped and gazed in silent admiration upon a native bush caravan making its way to the beach. The caravan was large and the carriers heavily laden with long, narrow baskets stuffed with native products. The loads were carried on their backs and supported from the forehead by a broad band of plaited grass causing their heads to constantly droop in a fatiguing manner. The carriers were dirty and spent and had evidently traveled far. So slight were their loin cloths that they might have been nude and about their necks were unsightly

*ju-ju*¹ charms to guard them from evil. They walked slowly and in single file. The faces of the men were hard and set, repulsive and brutal; the mouths of the women and children were open, indicating thorough exhaustion; the breasts of the women were flat, shrivelled and ugly, and in addition to the loads on their backs, in front, suspended from their necks in a piece of cloth or hide, the women bore their children.

For the first time the tragedy of the African bush was brought home to Huntingdon; horses, drays, roads were not there; all carriage was head portage and the laborers were a free people who toiled not for themselves but for the white man.

Longworthy, the man of trade, was decrying the lack of transport facilities and cursing the negro for his laziness, when Haywood expostulated, translating Huntingdon's very thoughts.

"After all, Longworthy, it's the poor devil of a negro who slaves and it's the white man who reaps the profits of this wealthy continent. Don't forget, that without the negro the white man would have no business here and Africa would keep her wealth."

It was such an unheard of thing for a white man, and a soldier, to defend the native that Longworthy cried in astonishment:

"Good heavens, Haywood, you must be tapped by the sun!"

"Not at all, Brother Longworthy, but I believe in giving the devil his due."

"He gets his due all right. Don't we pay him for every tap of work he does for us —"

¹ Local name for *fetish*, superstition.

"And don't we flog him unmercifully when he won't work —"

"He ought to be flogged the lazy —"

"Say, Longworthy, how much work would a white man do if nature provided every want for him as she does for these negroes — eh, answer me? "

"Well, she don't, then why lug that in —"

"Answer my question, please. Would you work unless you had to —"

"I'm damned if he ain't sun-tapped, Huntingdon. We'd better get him under shelter some place."

"I'm no more sun-tapped than you are. Answer me this, then; what is it we do with the natives and their lands when they are no longer of use to us? "

"Why, dammit it, Haywood, you soldiers kill more negroes than we traders do."

"But answer me, please, Longworthy, what is it we do —"

"Ah, cut it —"

"I'll answer my own question then. When we've destroyed the rubber vines in a district and scoured it clean for ivory and robbed the natives of everything else they possess, we desert the land and cast the natives aside like squeezed lemons. We call it exploitation, colonization, but it's robbery —"

"Hell, all colonies are built on dead men's bones —"

"That doesn't alter facts, and cruelty is cruelty and inhumanity inhumanity no matter under what guise they are administered —"

"It's you soldiers who administer them —"

"I'm not denying that —"

"Mebbe not, but you're becoming weak-kneed. Gad,

Huntingdon, I believe the erstwhile Captain Haywood of the *Royal Irish Fusiliers*’ll be turning sky-pilot and casting his life among these brutes who’d kill him at the first opportunity and *chop* him too if they didn’t fear the vengeance of the very body of men to whom he belongs. Every nigger’s a cannibal at heart and secret poisons and poisoned arrows are their favorite past-times.”

“ You’re right, Longworthy, about the cannibal and the poisons,” Haywood admitted, overlooking the insult to his courage, because he knew that Longworthy meant no insult, that anger is quick to come and quick to go on the coast, that the climate is responsible for most of the shortcomings of the white men. “ Still, because the negro does work for us — indifferently, I acknowledge, — his efforts ought to be appreciated, and because the negroes don’t arise in a body and massacre us and keep other white men from landing on their coast ought to earn them some consideration.”

“ It ought, but it don’t,” grumbled Longworthy, as he lead the way into the modern post office, where post cards, letters and cables were sent off to Europe.

Then followed a promenade through Freetown. Its narrow, hard-packed, sandy streets, without sidewalks, were blinding as molten metal under the fierce radiance of the African sun.

The heat was not the dry, blasting sort Huntingdon had anticipated; it was of palm-house mugginess and so dense and heavy that he seemed enveloped in a hot, steaming blanket which deluged him with sweat, prevented his getting a full breath, and made his legs seem like ton weights, and, though his brain willed them for-

ward, they were loath to obey. For the first time he experienced thorough enervation; his pith helmet was also tight and made his head ache and it seemed as though metal rods at white heat were being plunged into his eyes. He was thoroughly wretched, but he forced himself on; he laughed at the grandiloquent names of the various streets printed on boards nailed askew on corner palm trees; he admired the modern market on Market Street and took Longworthy's word for it that it contained every article exported from, or imported to, the colony, but he had no desire to explore it; however, he paused in admiration amidst the native markets where fat *mammies* and slender bush-women under the shelter of huge, black European umbrellas, haggled over their wares spread out on the ground in calabashes of all shape and sizes, crowding streets and impeding traffic. Noisy was the babel of tongues, and Huntingdon marveled at the good-natured disorder of it all.

In and out of a low, one story, frame building labeled *King's Own Bar* natives were passing; beneath the legend *Sara Cole, Trader*, in the doorway of her little shop stood the proprietress. She smiled broadly when Huntingdon stopped and glanced over her stock arranged on crude boxes on the sidewalk. He was thinking how hideous were the bold, colored designs on the heavy white china dishes, how utterly unnecessary to the negro were the European clothing prominently displayed to attract his attention, when two tiny girls, one about five and the other about three years of age, with only a strand of beads about their waists, advanced, balancing on their little well-poised heads copper basins holding water. They were slender and dainty as though a Phid-

ias had carved them from ebony, and they didn't notice the admiring white man until they came full upon him, then, the littlest one, startled, let drop her pan of water and ran away screaming, while the other stood stock still, too paralyzed to move. When Huntingdon passed on, she ran as fast as she could go and she too screamed at the top of her thin, childish voice.

“I say, old chap,” Longworthy called out, “look at the enormous girth of those cottonwoods! Africa's full of big timber and one day the world must look to her for lumber; if the negroes could be made into practical workmen, an enterprising white man could make millions out of her forests.”

Huntingdon knew that Longworthy spoke from actual experience and he was eager to hear him expound his ideas how best the timber could be worked, but such complete lassitude suddenly possessed him and so blinding were the sun-baked streets after the sea's undulating surface, that it was all he could do to keep his eyes open and remain upright. In positive agony he followed his friends, until, no longer able to endure, he cried:

“I say, don't you chaps mind this infernal heat?”

“Of course we do,” answered Haywood. “But there's no use growling about it. What's that quotation: *Lead on, O Zeus, where thou wilt. If follow I must, I'd rather go smiling and free, than spuling and in chains.*”

For several seconds Huntingdon gazed in silence upon Haywood, then he asked solemnly: “Doesn't it hurt, old chap, to spout classics in the tropics at this hour in this infernal heat?”

Before Haywood could reply, Longworthy ejaculated:

“Was that classics? I thought it was Marie Correlli,” and pulling off his limp collar and removing his coat, he threw them to a passing *boy*¹ and led the way to the club.

Morrison immediately joined them. He was a fussy little Englishman in whites with a broad, red silk *cummerband* wound about his thin hips.

“I’ve got some baggage for you, Captain Haywood. *Yorubas* —”

“Softly, softly, Morrison. We’ve got to first introduce Mr. Huntingdon to the club, hence the coast, then he’s one of us.”

“First time out, Mr. Huntingdon?” demanded Morrison.

“Cut your fool questions,” growled Longworthy. “Does he look like a vet?”

“Never can tell, never can tell,” gurgled Morrison, fussily, wriggling in his seat and drumming on the table with his fingers.

“For Christ’s sake,” yelled Longworthy, “get away from me with your rotten frazzled nerves. You’ll have mine going next and destroy all the good I ought to have from my respite in Europe.”

“Hang on to your temper, brother Longworthy, and your nerves’ll take care of themselves,” admonished Haywood.

Longworthy’s temper let go.

“People in glass houses ougltn’t to hurl rocks.”

“My nerves ain’t on edge!”

“The hell they ain’t!”

“If I didn’t know you for an otherwise decent chap, Longworthy, I — I’d box —”

¹ Servant of any age.

“ The man ain’t born who can lick me —”

“ Gentlemen, gentlemen,” soothed Morrison, “ here’s to the only land on earth: Merrie England, and to our King and Queen, God bless them.”

Helmets were off, men were on their feet, and argument was forgotten. Conversation was of England and the wagging of the world in civilized countries, when Haywood whispered to Morrison:

“ Lead us to the *mammies*.”

In a brick bungalow, surrounded by a wide veranda and reached by a long flight of wooden steps, Morrison brought forth the *Yorubas*. They were full-grown negresses, with slow-moving amorous eyes, sensuous mouths and gleaming white teeth.

The prettier of the two ran to Huntingdon and tried to take his hand, but Haywood turned the girl about, minutely examined her, then commanded:

“ Get down to the *Nigeria* on time. No didoing. Look the other one over, Longworthy.”

“ Oh, she’s all right,” expostulated Morrison. “ Collingwood’s guarantee for both.”

“ Yes, but how long is it since Collingwood sailed and who has had the *mammies* since then? An ounce of inspection’s worth a hogshead of trouble,” growled Longworthy, examining the girl.

“ You don’t suspect me!” cried Morrison.

“ Never can tell, never can tell,” and Longworthy mimicked Morrison’s tones and words at the club.

“ You’re all right,” finally agreed Longworthy. “ Get down to the *Nigeria* on time and see that you don’t get lost on the way, savvy?” and he pinched the girl’s arm none too gently.

"I say, Mr. Huntingdon," cut in Morrison, eagerly. "I can get you a *Timené*. New to white man, but such a beauty she's worth the training."

"Thanks, Morrison, I'll nose about for myself."

"See that you nose sure," retorted Longworthy, acridly. "Even an old coaster's often fooled."

Huntingdon leisurely turned and examined the cheap prints on the rough, wooden walls; then, slowly, he sauntered to the verandah.

"He's a bit squeamish, eh?" remarked Morrison.

"Oh, he'll work out of it," answered Haywood.

"The quicker, the better for him," growled Longworthy.

Haywood followed Huntingdon to the verandah, and, placing his hand on Huntingdon's shoulder, he said, affectionately:

"This *mammy palaver*, it's a serious thing, my boy. The best guarantee is the wife-that-was of an Englishman gone home — even that's not sure. My young *Yoruba's* taken with you. You can have her. The sooner you load up the better for you; it's the custom of the country."

"Thanks, old chap, but I won't load up — just yet. No offense, I hope?"

"It's your funeral," and Haywood shrugged his shoulders, dismissing the subject. "I'm due at the barracks on Tower Hill. Come along and see our West Indian regiments. Finest in the land. We recruit our Colonial troops here, you know."

But Huntingdon was too fatigued for further exertion. It was all he could do to get to the beach, and take canoe for the *Nigeria*. Thoroughly spent, he sank

into his long steamer chair and fell into a dose, from which he was awakened by the soft, musical laughter of women, and a grunt of disapproval from old Wallace stretched in a chair beside him.

The laughter came from the *Yorubas*, who were crossing the deck. The brilliant sunlight brought out their grace, their symmetry, their youth, their picturesque *ensemble*. Their feet, arms and neck were bare and their polished skin shone like rich ebony, while draped over a short, striped petticoat and brought up under the arms, across the breasts, was a cloth of fine texture whose bright hues effectively set off slender throats, swelling bosoms and tapering arms and whose clinging quality outlined forms sylph-like, sinuous and tempting. Their heads were swathed in fascinating silken kerchiefs and they walked with superb poise and grace. But for Huntingdon the artistic effect was spoiled because of the cheap European beads and bracelets and the nauseating odor of trade scent.

Just a few feet from the white men, the *Yorubas* stopped, and, affecting an earnest conversation, they shot sly glances at the white men, and coquettishly arranged their necklaces and bracelets.

“ I thought you’d attract the baggage,” sneered Wallace. “ Women are all alike — snares to bag men, and we’re fool enough to run into the net. I doubt if the oldest of those girls is sixteen, yet they’re as wise as owls, and they remind me of royal pythons; slow-moving, languid, gorgeously rigged out, and apparently harmless, but once in their toils, the very sap of life is squeezed out of ye! Steer clear of them, me boy, steer clear But can ye, that’s the palaver; can ye? ”

"Africa certainly breathes sex, Mr. Wallace."

"Smellin' calico's man's general pastime — if it ain't, then he ain't normal — or else there ain't no petticoats floating about. How many of us are true to our women? So bally few you can't find 'em. Where are the white men now? Off shore, *mammy-palavering*. No, sir, you can hide it all you've a mind to, but all men think about is women. D'ye reckon it's the climate and spirits alone that sends men off their nuts out here? Not by a long shot; it's mostly wenches. Here comes another piece of baggage — the three o' 'em's been sent aboard for somebody's use."

A very young girl joined the *Yorubas*. She was of the *Jakri* tribe, and her slight, graceful, childish figure was seductively outlined by a single piece of rich, red, soft cloth, drawn tight across her gently swelling bosoms. Her coloring was rich copper, and her face was unusually piquant for a native's.

"She's not more'n thirteen," went on Wallace, disgust lilting through his tones, "and she'll keep thin, ornery like that 'till she's twenty, then she'll commence to get fat. At twenty-five she'll be ugly fat, and at thirty-five she'll be an old hag, but she'll be that sooner if she bears *pickins*. Then in her old age she'll return to her native town and live on the fame that's hers because she was wife to a white man. Say what you will, Mr. Huntingdon, *mammy palaver* moves the world, it's meat and drink to us. When we're sold, we damn the women; when they're sold, they damn us. So it goes on, attraction and repulsion, so-called love and hate — eternal repetition."

"You're quite right," agreed Huntingdon, filling his

pipe, lighting it, then handing the tobacco pouch to the old coaster. Wallace helped himself and through puffs of smoke he said a bit sadly:

“Fellers feel more equal when tobacco’s a-burnin’.”

It was the first time the old man had ever acknowledged Huntingdon’s superior caste, and, ignoring the implication, Huntingdon said hastily:

“Men must have their fling — an affair now and then puts some sauce into life. Who’d be an anchorite?”

“Wise men, out here,” laconically replied Wallace.

The men smoked for some time in silence, then the old coaster continued:

“I hear, Mr. Huntingdon, that you’re affianced to a bonny lady at home. It’s the divvil’s own time ye’ll have out here to be true to her, and, if ye’ll take the advice of an old rake who’s been ruined by black wenches, ye’ll leave them severely alone. Me wife and kiddies got wind of me *mammy-palaverin’* out here and for twenty-odd years they’ve never recognized me. I went home this time solely to make peace but me woman’s one of them critters who never could overlook a nigger wench, — or any other sort; no, sir, I’m done for —” the old fellow sighed, then he continued in his customary reckless spirit, “The natives know the value of their women and they play upon all that is ornriest in us and we’ve got to pay the piper. More fools us. Look at them * * * over there,” and, raising his voice he yelled at the women: “Get below where ye belong or I’ll kick you into the sea.”

The women turned abruptly and upset an old *Hausa* merchant, picturesque in turban and *burnouse* and hung with decorated leathers which he was about to offer to

the white men. Laughing at the old Mohammedan's discomfiture, the women balanced themselves lightly upon the companion ladder, then disappeared below just as Skipper Hains' stentorian tones sang out:

"I say, Mr. Wallace, why don't you bring Mr. Huntingdon for'ard here to watch the *deckers* come off? He'll see more native life right here than in all his tramp about Freetown and without the fatigue of exertion and danger from sun-stroke."

On the foredeck, seething with cinematographic brilliance beneath the blinding, arid sun, was a panorama of activity and warring colors, of ornate clothing and of bush nudity that held Huntingdon enthralled. It was the excitement of a general exodus, amidst a babel of tongues, as family after family poured over the *Nigeria*'s sides, scrambling for places, while others were crowding the ladders and still others waited below in lighters for a chance to board the ship. Fat *mammies* bundled to the very eyes in European clothing and burdened with enormous packs and babies climbed awkwardly over the bulwarks, while the scantily draped, slender bush-woman, pipe in mouth, load balanced lightly on head and a baby slung securely from her shoulder in a strip of animal's hide, followed nimbly after, and, with eager, alert eyes, sought out the best place for the encampment of her family during the long voyage down the coast. Altercations were many and heated as women fought for positions; babies cried lustily as their tender noses and toes were jammed and bruised; children clothed principally in beads and *ju-ju* charms clung to their mother's limbs, wide-eyed, yet calm; while men swaggered about

unencumbered and free, for it was the East where women are as mud beneath the feet of their masters and slaves to their whims.

Conspicuous were a group of Mohammedans returning from a pilgrimage to Mecca. The men were tall, gaunt, lean, and black as the shades of night, with green turbans on their heads and their bodies fascinatingly swathed in voluminous white. Their feet were thrust into huge goat-skin sandals and across their shoulders were slung small leathern cases containing a line from *El Kôran*. Behind them trailed awkward human bundles enveloped in white. They sought out the starboard deck, which was less crowded because it contained no shade. One by one they sank on the deck, the bundles cast aside their ghost-like wrappings and revealed were fat, ugly, repulsive negresses, several of whom suckled infants, while a little girl of perhaps two years of age leaped from her mother's arms and toddled about, bumping into others and laughing gleefully. She was perfectly formed and about her neck, wrists, waist and ankles were pale blue beads which contrasted beautifully with her ebony skin. Again the artist in Huntingdon was aroused and he longed to possess her, but, like mother, like daughter, he reflected, and he contented himself with watching the child's graceful movements while old Wallace remarked:

“Mohammedanism's the religion for these negroes because it permits what they've always enjoyed: plurality of wives, and it takes from them their greatest vice, gettin' drunk. One sober nigger is worth a whole raft of drunken so-called Christian niggers. Anyhow, it ain't no place to send white women out here to teach God-

palaver to a lot of heathen who don't want to be taught, who don't want to and won't change their ways and who were a bally sight better off before they were taught the difference between right and wrong. These savages are *unmoral*, they ain't *immoral*, until Christian missionaries get after them and make hypocrites and liars out o' them. I haven't lived thirty years out here for nothin' and I tell you a nigger's a nigger and he'll always remain one. You savvy don't you, that them freaks of women and little girls in mother-hubbards and them boys in little shirts over cloths and those men mostly in night shirts are rigged out like that by the missionaries? Look at that specimen over there," and the old coaster pointed out a boy of perhaps fourteen wearing a much-too-small calico shirt ending just above a pot-belly with an abnormal navel and a much-too-long cloth which prevented his taking a step without holding it up. "Ain't he the orniest-looking freak you ever saw compared with those bush-boys clothed only in a girdle?"

"The bush-boy certainly looks more natural," Huntingdon agreed.

"Might as well buy sealskin sacques for a polar bear as send clothing to these heathen — one needs 'em about as much as t'other. If you was down there you'd smell the stink of them dressed-up niggers," and the old coaster fairly spat disgust. "I can spin you tales, and true ones too, about missionaries that would make your head swim —"

"Please, Mr. Wallace," interrupted Huntingdon, in whom the Anglican faith was strong, "leave me some of the beliefs in which I've been brought up."

"Ah, me boy, you've left civilization and Christianity far behind and you'll learn more in one month about the folly of attempting them here than you'd glean in a lifetime from the readin' of books and the mouthin's of sky-pilots. You can't make anything but a nigger out of a nigger and you can't change their centuries of superstitions and habits over night — and that's what the missionaries are trying to do. And the result? Making hypocrites, liars and conscious sinners where before only naturalness existed. If that's religion, then sky-pilots had better rest at home. Look at the niggers down there, a lot of beasts snarlin' for lairs, and then cast your eyes upon them Mohammedans. The latter's mindin' their own business and stickin' to theirselves. Poor though them beggars are, they think they'll ne'er see Mahomet's Paradise unless at least once in their lifetime they make the journey to Mahomet's grave, and so they scinge and screw and when they've got enough together to pay their way, off with their wimmin and their *pickins* they start. It takes them months, sometimes years to *trek* it, but years ner distance don't count with them; they live only to die, and they thrive on what would starve a fasting monk as on they *trek* to Mecca. Repeatedly they run afowl of roving Arabs and Berbers and are robbed of their little, but other and more fortunate pilgrims help them out, for charity, you savvy, is one of their greatest virtues. There was a sky-pilot on the voyage going home with me last time who was so ignorant and bigotted that he wouldn't even acknowledge that there could be any virtues at all in a Mohammedan. To him Mohammedans and savages are alike: both heathen. And one time when I called to pay

my respects to an English mission lady up on the Niger, there was a sewin' class goin' on and standin' off wistfully lookin' on wit' a child tuggin' at her breasts was a young woman who was actually sufferin' to join the others, but the English lady would have none o' her 'because' says the mission lady 'she's a *Magdalene*.' Sez I, 'D'ye come out fer to save sinners or saints?' Sez the lady, 'She's a common person, a huzzy.' Sez I, 'An' what's the others?' 'Proper wives,' sez the lady. 'Oh, they are,' sez I; 'well I'll be tellin' your Saintship that all them women belong to one man and in his town last night that one there a-teachin' the others was offered to me for six pence — Ah, ye needn't be blushin' and turnin' yer head,' sez I; 'and ye can't make fish o' one and fowl o' the other when old Wallace is by,' and that night I walked back to the town of the old chief's to settle the palaver in me own mind why one should be called a *Magdalene* and the others classed as saints. And what d'ye think I found — the *Magdalene* was a *Magdalene* because a man who had bought her as his wife didn't pay for her in full and her father took her from him and sold her to a man who offered to pay a little more for her, but that skunk also defaulted and the poor girl was sold to a dried-up ape old enough to be her father. Now it's known how many marriages this girl's made, but there's no way o' tellin' how much mixin' up the other lot's done, owned as they are by an onery old beast who lives off the wages of the bodies of his women. And that selfsame night back to their native town comes the missongirls, and with the *Magdalene* they were all up to their dirty, bush tricks. Now what have ye got to say to that?"

Huntingdon made no answer, and, after a time, the old coaster remarked, *à propos* of the Mohammedan women:

"Did ye ever in all your life see such ugly, stinkin' women! If they're the sort in Mahomet's heaven, then every Mohammedan ought to turn Christian."

The old coaster chortled at his own joke, then, representing Huntingdon's continued silence, muttering to himself he wandered away.

Huntingdon had forgotten Wallace nor did he hear his rambling, drawling narrative. He was completely absorbed in the Mohammedans. He admired their poise, their indifference. The pitiless sun beat down upon them with all its relentless ardor, but they heeded it not; their eyes roamed seaward over the water's blinding surface indifferent to its glare; noises vibrated about them, but they heard them not! Motionless as milestones of Fate they remained tranquil and unmoved amidst the life and unrest of the present. What perfect detachment: to ignore the present, to dream always and only of the future: Mahomet's heaven with its principal delights the *houris*! The East enthralled Huntingdon; her languor, her fanaticism permeated his very arteries while imagination's wings flew with him to the swift-flowing, sacred Nile on whose bosom lazily float broad *khiassas*, laden with *bersim*, and *feluccas*, bearing natives and donkey-boys; where blue-robed women fill their *goolahs*; where the faithful perform their ablutions, then, their sandals laid aside, kneel on the banks, and, with their faces towards Mecca, pray to the One and Only God; where a gang of conscripts, chained ankle to ankle on their way to

the river are silent and indifferent to their fate as is the way of the True Believer!

Then in memory's train came Cairo with its myriad nameless *mosques* and *minarets*; its houses of white stone and plaster, with flat roofs fashioned into gardens and promenades; its narrow, noisy *bazars* with their little *mushrabieh* panels, from behind which peep out women of the East, clothed as the East in barbaric splendor, as merchants haggle over *antichi* with gullible tourists from the new West!

Colossal, awe-inspiring loom the pyramids of Gizeh and Sakkara, tombs of mighty rulers returned to the dust from whence they sprung, and the Sphinx of Ephesus, inscrutable, disdainful and sarcastic, taunts the present with its secrets and defies time to decipher them! The Sphinx, fitting symbol of Egypt's peoples, transcendentally alluring and romantic and mysterious with a thousand incomputable yesterdays; the riddle of the past, the wonder of the present, the defier of the future, and withal a true Moslem: fatalistic and silent. Time has gone and time may come, but the Sphinx turns the same scarred countenance to human gaze, indifferent to the thoughts of men; indifferent to Time's assaults; inexorable as Fate itself; a monument of permanence amidst constant change!

How hot and waste and still lies the Sahara, a vast sea of opalescent sand, beneath the scorching, blasting sun and the invading *khamsin*, and *now and then in the vast expanse, stretching hundreds and hundreds of miles, is an oasis as a gem in a cloth of faded gold*. To it, across paths familiar to the feet of untold centuries

come: caravans of awkward camels, their eyes inquisitive and restless in their small heads, their ever-moving jaws chewing the cud of knowledge of Moslem and her peoples; Berbers and Arabs riding like the winds, their swathed bodies one with their noble white steeds; *sais* plodding patiently beside laden donkeys; pilgrims a-foot, weary and thirsty! For cool and restful is the shade of the date palms, nourishing is their sweet nut, and refreshing is the water!

"Tis early morn at Assiout and Abyssinian slaves are being sold in the market place; their supple, smooth, rounded youth and big, open, wondering eyes, contrasting sympathetically with the shriveled skin and piercing, crafty, half-closed eyes of the aged Arabian slave-dealers.

"Tis high noon, all nature rests and the pitiless sun reigns supreme.

Gorgeous is the sunset o'er the Mokkattan Hills; plaintive is the evening sky; mysterious is submerged Philæ under a brilliant moon; majestic and silent is Pharaoh's Bed at Assouan.

"Tis night! Dingy *cafés*, thick with the tobaccos of the east, breathe assignations, lust and crime. Coffee is thick and perfumed with *ambergris*; drugs are many and stupefying; and Orientals and Occidentals are fascinated unto helplessness by the lure of it all!

Oh, Egypt, the sorceress, the betrayer, the seducer, the enchantress!

Oh, Ramadam, the fast by day; the hours of lazy dreaming; the sunset signal; the call of the *Muezzins*; the uncovering of millions of cooking pots; the escape of their tempting odors; the night of gorging and feast-

ing and orgy, then the peep of day from out Nile's sacred bosom when all True Believers turn towards the East and demand pardon for their sins from Allah, the One and Only God!

And now the *khamsin* is blowing: that hot wind of Egypt and the Soudan, that withers and parches the skin until it cracks in its misery!

Tribesmen and fierce dervishers bow down before it.

*Allah kerim.*¹

*Allahu akbar.*²

*La ilaha illa-llah.*³

Through the remembered moan of wind and rush of sand o'er Huntingdon's sensitive being there flowed the plaintive sing-song of the river workers:

*Turn, O, Sakkia, turn to the right and turn to the left.
The Nile floweth by night and the balasses are filled at dawn;
The maid of the village shall bear to thy bed the dewy gray goolah
at dawn;
Turn, O, Sakkia.*

Then followed the weird *Alla-haly'm alla-haly*; the monotonous beat of *darabukkeh* and the brisk music of the exciting *fantasias*. *Ghawsees* sway voluptuously in the Oriental dance; their reddened eyelids, fringed with heavy lashes darkened with *kohl*, languorly open and close, permitting fleeting glimpses of eyes, dark and moist; tiny, white teeth gleam provokingly through carmine-tinted lips; bracelets clink musically on rounded wrists and ankles, swelling bosoms rise and fall in amor-

¹ God is bountiful.

² God is most great.

³ There is no Deity but God.

ous rhythm and the vermiculations of the abdomen grow wilder and wilder, stealing from men their senses and planting therein the ardent sting of desire!

Thus in Huntingdon's brain the spiders of memory wove an intricate design, without rhyme or continuity, of Egypt, Luxor, Karnak; of crooked, winding, filthy streets; of pariah dogs; of vermined, ragged beggars; of hapless *fellaheen*; of *minarets*, whole citadels of them; of *kiosks*; of temples; of *Muezzins*; the constant chanting of prayers, of petitions and the perpetual thanksgiving to the ever-present and terrifying Prophet.

Huntingdon withered beneath the scorn of the white-clad, silent Mussulman, for him, a *Nazarene* and an unbeliever! He recognized what an insignificant creature he was, viewed from the aisles of their great antiquity!

La ilaha illa-llah!

Conscription, *corvee*, death are received with a shrug — the fatalistic *malaish* of the True Believer. All is written, it must come to pass!

The Orient, the irresistible, passion-begetting, sense-disturbing Orient! Musty as Time itself, rotten with disintegration; putrid and decadent with the offal of centuries and peoples, crimes and virtues, lust and greed! History making, history destroying! A dust heap of *débris*, a monument of preserved education! A riddle and a Paradox! An assertion and a denial!

Huntingdon was alone on the upper deck: the only white man who felt the Call of the East and succumbed to its witchery.

A sunset gun boomed in the harbor of Freetown.

Huntingdon attuned his ear, awaiting the *Muezzin's* call to prayer. The material call did not reach him, but,

below, every Mussulman's face was turned towards Mecca. Sandals were removed and chaplets brought forth. Solemnly, silently, now rising to their full height, now prostrate on the deck, indifferent to the jeers of men and the mocking laughter of women, prayers were silently offered to Allah, the one and only God.

Him the Just, the Living, the Irresistible; the Greatest Giver; the Great Provider; the One who opens to truth the hardened hearts of men; the Only, the Eternal, the Immutable One!

There is no other God but God and Mahomet is His Prophet!

Oh, the lure of Allah, the seduction of the East! Huntingdon went down before them as does a sand-heap before the onrushing *khamsin*. He leaned heavily against the ship's railing, his head dropped on his arms and drowsiness o'ercame him. The heat of Africa's sun was in his arteries, over-exertion tenanted him. He, hypercivilized and of a long race of England's noblest and best men, was but a sensitive instrument, high pitched and high strung, awaiting a player to bring forth the melody of laughter or the wail of tears. He was but a puppet, a marionette for Africa, the inexorable, to do with as she willed!

Near the horizon line in the west, the sun, a flaming disk of fire, hung low, bathing the world in vivid pink and gold, but for a breath of time only, for, like a heavy plummet let fall by a hand tired of holding it, it was plunged precipitously downward. Left behind were streamers of gorgeous colors which, spreading o'er expanse of water and sky, quickly dissolved into soft, amber shades, the precursors of the mystic velvety blue

of the plaintive African night, while in the east a slender crescent showed the moon at her birth!

Suddenly Huntingdon, the human reed, shivered violently in the chilled breath of impersonal night, then a harsh, vibrant call rang out bringing him back with a jerk to the present and the mundane.

It was the half-hour bugle before dinner. Mechanically, Huntingdon went below to dress.

Boynton gave a farewell dinner to his fellow passengers and to his cronies from Freetown. It was a *bandobust* which would give him something agreeable to think about in his lonely bush life. What mattered it though he borrowed money with which to pay for wines and viands, what mattered it that he and his merrymaking companions abetted Africa in her relentless warfare against the white alien! Men wanted to forget the hour, the place; reckless was their abandon nor thought they of consequences. The orgy oppressed Huntingdon. He wanted to be alone, in the night with Africa — alone with the dreams that lilted drowsily through his fever-touched brain.

On the upper deck he gazed listlessly out into the night. He had no knowledge of how long he sat there, nor of his thoughts. He knew only that Captain Hains' hand was on his shoulder and the Irishman's hearty voice cried:

“ It's no place for ye, me lad, out in the African night. The dews bring dysentery and death. Come! ”

In the skipper's quarters forward electric lights beamed attractively and broad low divans invited relaxation and repose. On one of them Skipper Hains threw himself,

and, motioning Huntingdon to outstretch on another, he ordered champagne with plenty of ice, and growled:

“ Land on shore’s a-simmering like a mud cake in a blast furnace, me lad. It’s glad I am to be on board again.”

He appeared not to notice Huntingdon’s silence nor the languor that possessed him, but he gave him most of the wine, which, coupled with the home-like atmosphere of the skipper’s quarters, brought back Marjorie and England to Huntingdon and caused him to demand abruptly:

“ I say, Skipper, d’you believe in love? ”

The skipper’s blue eyes danced merrily and delicious and thick was his brogue:

“ Thot’s wan av thim dom fool questions, and me an Irishman from Belfast! It’s all the gurrls I love, so let’s drink to our wimmin, me lad, our port in the storms of life, our compass in dangerous channels and strange roadways! May they never know the worst of us and we see only the best in them. Chin, chin! ”

Both men drained their glasses, and a woman’s laugh floated up from amongst the deckers.

“ It’s lots of *mammy-palaver* I’ve seen, me lad,” confessed Skipper Hains, his serious thoughts driving the brogue from his speech. “ There’re only two sorts of women in the world: the good and the bad. Even the worst old rooster that comes out to this coast respects a good woman, but as to the other sort — they didn’t become so by themselves and I won’t sling mud at them. I’m human and I don’t expect women nor men to be angels. And I’m Irish and a pair o’ red lips are mighty

tempting, but these long coast voyages and the uncertainty of life keep me from marrying and having a nest of me own, but sometimes — sometimes —" and the laughter died out of the merry blue eyes and the skipper never finished his sentence.

Huntingdon sensed the skipper's loneliness and was silent with him and in that silence a friendship between the two men was born that was to endure for life.

Six bells rang out and the skipper sprang to his feet, exclaiming:

"Bedtime, me lad. I'm Irish and I need all the sleep I can get. After to-night and for the next ten days it's not much off the bridge I'll be. We're approaching the most treacherous part of the coast and it's mother's sons like ye, Irish Hains has in his keeping. Irish Hains is called the best skipper that sails this coast and he must live up to his reputation. If it lies in his power to take ye safely out and bring ye back again, he'll do it, for neither spirits nor wenches nor gambling games can seduce him from his post."

Huntingdon smiled.

"I know, me lad, it's blarney ye think I'm giving ye, but it's many a squadron of blue divvils Irish Hains has seen retreat under full sail before a stiff breeze of blarney."

As Huntingdon's slim, white clad figure disappeared down the companion ladder, Hains called out:

"And if thim same blue divvils come after ye, seek out Irish Hains, for it's not lonesome ye need to be on the *Nigeria*, and don't forget to be after taking your daily dose of quinine in the morning."

Huntingdon's cabin was stifling after the skipper's

cool quarters ; the air-chute charmed no breeze from the humid night, but it brought to Huntingdon the gossip of the native *crewboys* who attended their masters' pleasure. Every little act of the white man was commented upon, confidential affairs were made public property.

After what seemed an eternity, Huntingdon heard Boynton take leave of his *compagnons de voyage* and the going ashore of the visitors from Sierre Leone, then the gentle wash of the waters against the *Nigeria*'s side lulled him to sleep.

CHAPTER IV

RELUCTANT morning crept forth from a thick haze; Sierra Leone sweltered beneath vaporous clouds; not a wind stirred, and the heavy, moist heat continued.

By ten o'clock coaling was finished; hatches were closed; surf boats hung from their davits; *crewboys* took their place among the *deckers*; anchor was pulled, and without any fuss, the *Nigeria* was off on the long trail.

Towards noon, the fog lifted, but the dead calm continued; higher and higher climbed the thermometer; the heat was withering; the glare of the sun blinding.

A stoker looked out from the shade of the fore peak, his pale, thin, nervous face contrasting sharply with the full, black, stolid faces of the *deckers*, who, under the pitiless sun, lay in all attitudes of abandon. It was difficult to tell where one family began and the other ended, so jumbled together were they, like friendly cattle. Some slept; others gazed into space; nobody talked; nobody moved; the East knows how to live the East.

Suddenly, a woman threw off her cotton covering and stretched herself flat on the deck. Towards the fiery heavens her face was turned. A spasm of acute pain wrung her heavy features; perspiration streamed from her; she dug her nails into the deck; she muttered some low words; those nearest her drew away, giving her more room — and — then her child was born!

There was no excitement; not even comment. Her own family looked on indifferently for it was Africa where women are numbered with the beasts.

The mother slept the sleep of exhaustion. Eventually, she would awake, rub the infant with palm-oil, hang *ju-ju* charms about its tender neck, and suckle it, as beasts suckle their young! No kiss, no caress would be its joy; no wrapping in soft, protecting cloths; no rejoicing, no christening; no comments by loving relatives and admiring friends. Unattended it came into the world, unattended it would pass through the world, unattended it would leave the world. Each must fight his own battle! Woe to the weakling and the timid!

Unlike the foredeck, the upper deck was deserted. It was suicide for a white man to remain thereon. The main deck was double-canvased in an attempt to keep out the sun's blinding glare, and on its sunny side cooks' mates and *galleyboys* passed lazily back and forth, indifferently attending to their duties.

A *galleyboy*, clad only in trousers, bearing a tureen of hot soup to the forecastle hands, was bumped into by a Sierre Leonion *crewboy*. The dish crashed to the deck; two scalded, frightened men glared at each other, then came the argument in pidgin English. Each accused the other. Blows were about to descend, when the Second Officer happened by. The *crewboy* was ordered to the forward deck and forbidden to leave it. The *galleyboy* was commanded to clean the deck.

He slouched away, only to slouch back again carrying a pail and a mop. Indifferently and indolently he swabbed the deck, then, with his elbows resting on the lower rail, he gazed steadfastly at the strip of blinding

silver water athwart his vision. His head dropped to the scuttle and he slept, to be rudely awakened by the vicious kick of a passing deck hand, followed by the sardonic laughter of a big, burly negro who all but dozed over his task of polishing brass trimmings.

The *galleyboy* growled ominously, murder looked from out his eyes, deep set under low brows; sullenly he slouched aft where he stopped to tell his troubles to the Sierre Léone washerman, only to receive another kick for his pains; then swearing softly, he disappeared.

To the washerman all clothing looked alike. Coarse, much-soiled flannels were commingled with fine, fairly clean white linens. The work was bad, but it was the only kind available. White men could take it or leave it; they took it with a curse as they take everything Africa deals out to them.

Just then tenderfeet were experiencing some of the phases of hell the old coasters had pictured to them. Nor were the old coasters exempt from suffering; each and every man was absolutely miserable, as, on the shaded side of the main deck, they lay outstretched on long steamer chairs, unwashed and dishevelled. Heads ached; throats were parched; eyeballs burned; nerves were all a-quiver; odors of cooking smote sensitive nostrils, and nausea hovered over men theretofore strangers to it. It was the day after the night before and that night had been a strenuous one. No man's temperature was normal; movement meant a deluge of perspiration and there was but one desire: to remain inert and quaff long, cool drinks.

Very few went below to luncheon and several of those got but a whiff of the dining-saloon when they scrambled

back to their deck chairs. Stewards were the only ones with life in them, and they served drinks eagerly for they knew their tips would be large.

With the going down of the sun, a slight breeze came up, and Huntingdon, looking for diversion, went among the *deckers*. He paused in amazement before the newly-born baby; never, in all his life did he see anything like it: the tiny, unclothed atom lay on its mother's breast, pink, wrinkled like a monkey and curled up like one. His sensitive, refined nature revolted at its treatment; he forgot that he had left civilization and its customs far behind, so he went to his cabin and returned with soft, white linen and a rich, woolen shawl.

Although he made it clear that the gifts were for the protection of the baby, the mother smiled broadly; ostentatiously she wound the linen about her head, then she arose, and, keenly alive to the sensations of envy aroused in her less fortunate sisters, she slowly draped the magnificent shawl about her hips, tucked the infant in the front of it and deliberately walked about.

The other women crowded around Huntingdon, and, thrusting their children at him, demanded gifts in divers tongues.

“ Back away, Mr. Huntingdon,” called Skipper Hains from the bridge. “ It’s full of contagion every one of them is, annyhow they’ve no business to pester ye.”

A withered negro, dressed in a ragged, filthy night-shirt and a disreputable straw hat, complained that he was *sick for belly!*

“ Leave him to me, Mr. Huntingdon,” called the skipper. “ I’ll be after putting an end to the pestering of ye,” and, whistling gayly, the nimble skipper descended

the ladder, sought his quarters and mixed a stiff dose of *capsicum, epsom salts, quinine and rot-gut!*

The skipper's whistle gave notice that he was up to some deviltry and white men came to life and crowded the main deck forward.

The begging negro was summoned. Explaining to his brothers the honor conferred on him, with great dignity he mounted the ladder, and, at sight of the drink awaiting him, his face cracked into minute wrinkles of pleasure, he rubbed his stomach in anticipated delight, he reached out a hand calloused and wrinkled like a gorilla's.

The eyes of the white and the black men were full upon him; the former waiting the amusement sure to be afforded them, the latter in envy.

The negro took one swallow, then gagged.

"Down with it, you blue spotted Son of Ham," bellowed the skipper, his blue eyes ablaze with laughter, his arm uplifted as though he would strike the wretch.

"Down with it," yelled old Wallace, while other men, both white and black, laughed their keen delight.

The negro reluctantly drank the concoction, his eyes almost bulging from his head; his Adam's apple working riotously up and down his long, shrivelled neck; his black, cracked lips puckered tragically, comically. As the fiery liquid ate into his alimentary canal, he drew up his shirt and with both hands violently rubbed his stomach; he stuck out his long tongue; he opened and closed his eyes vigorously; from one foot to another he hopped, then, doubled almost in two, he started for the ladder. Highly amused and vociferously expressing that amusement, well-directed kicks from the white

man sent the negro flying down the ladder to the fore-deck, where his own received him boisterously and roughly. Thus did pride precede a humiliating tumble, but Huntingdon was never again bothered.

The next day the Black Republic of Liberia was left behind, and, as the *Nigeria* slowly continued along Africa's historic coastline, the rollers grew longer and higher and a mirage off shore and the extraordinary refraction emphasized all the more the miseries of the long voyage. Theretofore, the coast had been indistinct, blurred, and Huntingdon's romantic mind had pictured it mountainous and alluring as at Sierra Leone, but, alas, it was flat, monotonous and low-lying; all sea level. Four lines of color paint the picture: one, long and blue-gray, for the sea; over that the snow-white length of surf; then the yellow strip of sand cut off by the interminable dark green border of the vegetation from out of which stand the palms, and last above all the line of the sky's blue.

That was all for weary eyes to look upon day after day and league after long league! The maddening monotony and sameness of it all ate into the very soul of the exiles, and made snarling beasts of them. Tempers let go, quarrels took place over nothing; outrageous slanders were concocted and spread; men, who at home fled the house at mere mention of wash day, for whole days at a time watched the washerman at his task, fairly dancing with demoniacal glee when fine linens came forth scorched and ruined!

Huntingdon swore at the condition of his shirts, he vowed he would never wear them again, but the wise cabin steward tucked them away in Huntingdon's kit

and there came a day when Huntingdon was glad to get them. At night gambling was again indulged in; stakes were high, playing reckless. Salaries for years ahead were anticipated; many I. O. U's were issued.

Food, too, was monotonous, tasteless and unappetising and from much drink and little exercise, men took on flesh rapidly. Huntingdon and Haywood resented their growing waist lines, but Wallace and Longworthy bothered about nothing save the slow passing of leaden-heeled time.

At last Grand Bassam on the Ivory Coast was sighted, and, abreast of it three miles off shore, the *Nigeria* cast anchor in a confused sea resembling breakers. Plainly visible in the offing were the masts of a sunken steamer; but the beach was hidden behind a wall of high-leaping spray and the angry roar of the surf drowned all other sounds. The *Nigeria* rocked so like a thing of cork that the *mammy-chair* was necessary to convey passengers to the surf boats waiting to receive them. The chair is a huge palm-oil puncheon, out of which several staves are sawed and a bottom put to the hole as a seat. To dangle in it from a crane, with angry seas dancing far beneath, is an experience dreaded by the bravest.

About Hertford, Kingsford and two other tenderfeet whose destination was reached, old Wallace croaked like a bird of evil on the pleasures of the descent of the *mammy-chair*; the treachery of the seas; the hunger of the watchful sharks, and the yellow fever of a particularly virulent type prevalent in Grand Bassam.

Despite the terrors awaiting and the dangers threatening him, Huntingdon could no longer endure the confinement of the ship. He must have change even though it

led to his death. Old Wallace did his best to dissuade him from seeking that surf-menaced, dangerous shore, but Huntingdon was obdurate. When with a thud the *mammy-chair* dropped to the deck, he was the first one to step into it.

Hertford and two other tenderfeet followed, then came the braggart, Kingsford, taking care to sandwich himself securely between the others.

“Good-by, good health and good luck,” had been repeated over and over again, and Kingsford had just broken forth in blustering bravado:

“Now to show these old croaks that we ain’t the jelly-fish they think us. I ain’t seen anything yet that can bowl me over. Let ’er —,” when with a sudden jerk, up and out, shot the *mammy-chair*.

The breath left Huntingdon’s lungs; his eyes, terror-widened, gazed down upon heaving depths and bobbing surf boats, oh, so far away! It didn’t seem possible for the chair to connect with the boats, and hungry blue sharks were everywhere!

However, he clung fast to the chair and did his best to retain his breakfast. To give up food before that jeering, onlooking crowd, was the epitome of agony. Then, as if the crowd were waiting for that very thing, up floated Wallace’s command:

“Let ’er go, boys; don’t mind us. You’ll feel better if you give up; we’re here to be amused; we need it; we’re rotting away for want of it; don’t be stingy, give up!”

A stoker from the fore-peak shouted sarcastically:

“Ah, hold on t’ yer guts, you coves! Don’t enter Hell’s Playground showin’ white livers.”

Young Hertford, up in the air, tortured beyond endurance, essayed to jump from the chair, but again came the stoker's voice:

"Set down, you fool, or you'll never git a chance to set down again."

A white-clad, white-faced creature wobbled uncertainly and began to wretch.

It was Kingsford.

Wallace danced with glee and shouted:

"Aha, how's the jellyfish now; gwan, give up, the sharks're hungry!"

All this time a black man stood with signalling arm erect, watching for the surf boat to come up on the swell and ready to signal the man at the donkey-winch when the proper time for lowering came!

At last his arm dropped!

As suddenly as the chair had shot up and out, abruptly and swiftly, it descended as a thing dragged down by relentless fate. Huntingdon's very vitals heaved convulsively; then there were a collision, a dumping into a narrow, unsteady space, a jangle, a pull, a shooting upward and away of the chair, a tossing, pitching surf boat and white men half dead with fright and unmistakably seasick were afloat upon an undulating, blinding sea, huddled on the thwarts of a rudder canoe between two banks of native paddlers perched on the gunwales like women on side-saddles!

As the shore was approached, the roar of the surf increased in volume and waves fought each other like angry beasts, sending up a wall of spray which seemed impenetrable. In the breakers, contending, unseen forces seized the canoe and tried to tear her from the restrain-

ing hands of the paddlers, but without avail, and frightened, sea-drenched white men crawled on the backs of negroes and were landed on the beach out of harm's way.

Huntingdon gazed upon the *Nigeria*, oh, so far away, and he felt suddenly and strangely desolate! He wanted to board her again, and at once; he had no desire for exercise or to explore Grand Bassam! Solemnly he took leave of the others; there was no rancor then between him and Kingsford, oh, no! Africa was a hard life, the climate deadly; it was certain that some, perhaps all, of them would never again climb a ship's side on a return voyage! Huntingdon demanded to be at once taken off to the *Nigeria*.

The rudder canoe lay well up in the sand and Huntingdon recognized at once that to launch her was no easy task. He wondered how the *Krus* and the *Accras* would go about it.

The *Kru* who had borne him to shore, again took him on his back and stowed him in the center and bottom of the canoe; then paddlers and beachmen ranged themselves on either side of the canoe, grasping the thwarts well down, ready to lift the boat out of her sand-dock and shove her off at a favorable opportunity. Huntingdon marveled further how any human being dare enter those breakers, let alone attempt to land and take away men and cargo! He knew full well what the paddlers were watching and waiting for; that they could not set forth at will, they must await the inrolling of a favorable swell.

Now that danger was at hand, fear fled from the white man; he watched wave after wave come in and break with deafening noise and astounding fury, nor did he mind

the spray that drenched him. He was a sportsman, keen for the fray! It was human ingenuity *versus* impersonal but powerful opponents. The rapidly receding sand and the explosion and spray revealed the tremendous force of the undercurrents, and over Huntingdon rushed ardent admiration for the Portuguese, who in the fourteenth century braved that coast and left their traces in the whitewashed forts and little dreary towns that now and then break the weary monotony of the horizon line. Huntingdon recalled how European colonization followed the trader, and he paid full tribute to those early men — pirates, brigands and slave-dealers though they were — who had the courage to defy treacherous seas, hostile natives and the all-blasting sun!

A favorable swell came rolling in. The *Krus* took a firmer hold on the thwarts and braced themselves for quick action. At the rudder in the stern stood the coxswain, his body bent forward, his eyes narrowed and set like a vulture's making ready for sudden descent upon its prey.

On and on came the roller, growing in height and volume! The eye of every black man was upon it! It was a canoe length away! It rushed under the nose of the canoe! The canoe was mounting its ridge, when a quick command fell from the lips of the coxswain! His knees and hands gripped the tiller! Beachmen and paddlers gave a mighty shove! The canoe was afloat on the expended wave! Simultaneously, so as not to overbalance the boat, every paddler leaped to his seat on the gunwale, his back to the prow; beachmen scrambled back to shore through the turbulent eddies, and, aided by a

peculiar sculling motion of the paddles, the coxswain dexterously kept the nose of the canoe seaward.

The backward pull of the undercurrents became manifest and Huntingdon wondered why the coxswain restrained his men instead of urging them forward, but he did not wonder long, for, in the space where they would have been had they dashed forward, a tremendous wave broke and it was all the black men could do to keep the canoe from spinning about and capsizing. Huntingdon ducked under the thwart when the roller broke, but not a black man changed his position; their eyes were intent on the coxswain who was eagerly studying the incoming seas.

One, two, five, ten minutes passed. They seemed an eternity to Huntingdon and he marveled how the strength of the blacks held out. Nor was he the only anxious one. Better than he the natives knew the treachery of the surf which girds their country like an almost impenetrable wall and of the heavy annual toll in human lives exacted by it; the millions of pounds sterling lost in cargo.

Suddenly, another quick command fell from the coxswain's lips; there was another display of prompt, concerted action; again the canoe shot forward, then was checked, then urged forward again. An expert oarsman himself, Huntingdon recognized full well what finished art it was to coddle and coax a canoe beyond the danger line of undertow and breakers.

The open sea was gained, and, back and forth as one man, flashed the blades of the paddlers. Their stroke was rhythmic, effective, and the canoe fairly leaped forward under its impetus. The white-topped

rollers came and went, now long, now short as the canoe took swell after swell and rode them gracefully to the next ridge; here and there a porpoise leaped high, and off to the south a whale blowed.

The sun shone brilliantly upon the nude backs of the paddlers and threw into bold relief a magnificent display of muscles developed to the highest perfection. Not an ounce of energy was misspent; nor did paddling seem an effort, as, lightly balanced on the gunwales and with no purchase save that afforded by their cross-locked legs, the paddlers swayed back and forth, gracefully and easily, their guttural *r-r-r-r-r's* keeping time with their stroke.

The team work was superb and to Huntingdon an international regatta at Henley seemed amateurish in comparison. Huntingdon fully comprehended why those mighty Neptunes were the backbone of the white man's trade in Africa and, as his eyes and close watching showed his admiration, the paddlers smiled like pleased children, exposing white, perfect teeth.

The *Nigeria* reached, Huntingdon lightly leaped from the bobbing canoe into the *mammy-chair*. The latter held no terror for him then; he was all enthusiasm and he explained to Longworthy, Wallace and Haywood that such an exhibition of expert canoe-handling was well worth any fear he had felt or danger he had encountered.

The coxswain was given two guineas by Huntingdon for himself and his men, and loud and hearty were the thanks which floated up to the *Nigeria*.

The next day while Skipper Hains slept, a *Kru* and an *Accra* got into a fight. They pommelled each

other lively before the First Mate could have them separated and cast into the hatch until such time as the skipper could administer punishment. It was nearly half a day later when Hains, clad in fresh whites, and armed with a short *cashing-go*,¹ descended to the fore-deck.

The whole ship was excited. While the exiles would have welcomed any diversion however slight, a fight was something they never dreamed of and because it was at hand, they crowded forward for coigns of advantage. Huntingdon and old Wallace succeeded in throwing their legs over the ship's railing upon which they climbed, while at their backs were Longworthy and Haywood. The forecastle head was filled with pushing stokers and deck hands, and the excited, jabbering *deckers* were thrust back to make room for the combatants.

The sudden change from the gloomy depths of the hatch to blinding daylight was too much for them. They clapped their hands over their eyes and uncertain were their legs. They were a sorry sight, too, covered with blood, grease and perspiration.

Flecking his *cashing-go* across their calves in a manner which caused the wretches to wince, the skipper demanded the cause of the palaver.

“Them *Acca* stole my woman last night and I never look ‘um,” complained the *Kru*, in a deep voice with murder in it.

Loud and ribald was the laughter of the white men, echoed by the *deckers*.

¹ Whip of hippopotamus hide.

"Silence!" roared Skipper Hains. "Accra, make answer!"

"Me, I never look him woman. Woman look me. Me, I never mek mouth so," came the vigorous denial.

"You're a liar—" old Wallace began to shout, but the skipper's voice drowned his words:

"Don't you sons of Ham savvy fight-palaver ain't permitted on any ship?"

There was no response from the culprits, but white men wiggled and chortled, *deckers* grunted, children giggled and a woman laughed shrilly and unmusically. It was she who was the cause of the disturbance.

"Answer," commanded the skipper in an awful voice, "don't you savvy fighting's against ship's rules?"

The heads of the two culprits nodded a reluctant "yes."

"So ye do, d'ye? Well, now your punishment for disobedience. Here you"—and the skipper summoned a deck hand who carried a lump of waste. "Rub the stinking grease off them niggers and let 'em stand up and fight each other proper."

The deck hand set to, but he was too slow for the vigorous Irishman. Hains grabbed a piece of waste, and, throwing it to Sampson, a powerful *Kru*, he yelled:

"Get off them grease one time, Sampson. I've got other fish to fry than settling palavers for black pippins."

The cleaning process was anything but gentle, and everybody enjoyed it except the sufferers.

Skipper Hains laid down the rules.

"At each other fair and square and fight it out. No

kicking or punching. The first man who fouls I'll kick hell out of. Now go!"

Unaccustomed to fair fight, the negroes fouled repeatedly. The skipper cut in with his *cashing-go*, leaving welts and bruises behind.

Suddenly the *Accra*'s knee shot upwards and with tremendous force was driven into the *Kru*'s groin. Down dropped the *Kru* with a frightful cry of acute pain!

The cowardly thrust enraged the white men. "Give him hell, Skipper, give him hell," yelled Huntingdon.

But the skipper needed no prompting. He beat the *Accra* unmercifully; he called him *swine* and all the choice words included in his vociferous vocabulary; he felled him, then kicked him to his feet.

Sampson helped the *Kru* to arise; again the negroes faced each other and the skipper commanded:

"One more round and it's to be the finish this time and no more fouling, savvy?"

For several solemn seconds the *Kru* and the *Accra* studied each other. Murder was in their pose and both were suffering visibly. The *Kru*'s left eye was swollen shut and blood was trickling down the *Accra*'s throat where the *cashing-go* bit. Their powerful chests heaved like hard-worked bellows and their big nostrils dilated rapidly as air was pumped into exhausted lungs. Their wind gained, the skipper thundered:

"GO!"

With lowered heads and like enraged bulls the men sprang for each other; each clutched the other's neck and head butted head viciously. No other than a negro's could have withstood the pounding. Eyes were

bruised; noses flattened; the *Kru's* upper teeth cut through his lip; the *Accra's* chin went in and the hot blood spurted forth in sticky streams.

White and black men yelled with glee: all were on a level now — savages clamoring for blood.

The skipper tried to separate the combatants.

“Let 'em alone, Skipper!” came from Huntingdon.

“It's too pretty a sight to shut off!” cried Haywood.

“Let it be to a finish!” yelled Longworthy.

“At him, you *Kru!*” commanded old Wallace.

“Come on, you *Accra!*” urged Cartwright, “there's lots of fight yet in both of you!”

The heads of the negroes were pressed so closely together that cheek bruised cheek, blood commingled with blood, and there was no chance for butting. Suddenly, the fingers of the *Accra* closed on the *Kru's* windpipe!

Again the skipper's fury was great; repeatedly on the *Accra's* head his *cashing-go* descended but the *Accra* continued to choke the *Kru* until he had him flat on the deck!

At the foul act, white men cried their indignation:

“Kill him, Skipper, kill the brute!”

Huntingdon led the descent to the foredeck; *deckers* pushed and crowded; trampled children screamed with fright; the excitement was terrific!

“Mr. Whiting, clear the deck!” came the skipper's stentorian command.

“McGrew, Kinney, Sampson, the *Kru*, clear the deck!” ordered Whiting, grabbing a chair and breaking it over the heads of the *deckers* nearest him; while McGrew laid on with a piece of cable; Sampson used

his mighty fists, and the skipper faced the white men and in a low tone said:

“Back to your deck, gentlemen; this is no example to set to negroes!”

The white men slowly obeyed, and the skipper cried:

“To the hatch with the *Accra*! Nothing to eat until Lagos, then ashore with him never again to be taken aboard an Elder-Dempster boat.”

The *Kru* lay unconscious in a pool of blood; his eyes stared; his tongue hung out, lacerated by his teeth, and his face was pulp. Dr. Young, the ship's surgeon, advised sending him to the forecastle. A steamer chair was folded, the wounded man was placed thereon and borne forward, followed by the doctor and the skipper.

The *deckers* were wrought to a high pitch of excitement; they gesticulated wildly, and, in a babel of dialects, some denounced the *Accra*, others accused the *Kru*.

Haywood, the military man, was alert. If the *Kru* were killed, he feared a tribal riot — blood for blood is the universal law of the savages; no death goes unavenged.

In a low voice he expressed his fears to those about him:

“Should these black devils range themselves against us, we white men will be powerless. Stay you here while I descend among the *deckers* and under no consideration appear to notice me or follow me. I don't like the actions of those two big *Krus* down there; if their brother dies, and I fear he will, and the news should leak out, the *Krus* will demand the life of the *Accra* and then there'll be hell to pay!”

Every white man recognized the gravity of the situation, and, as Haywood lazily descended among the *deckers* and carelessly edged himself between the two burly *Krus*, white men were apparently engaged in desultory conversation, yet their every sense was alert and each regretted his firearms packed safely away in the hold!

Haywood's suspicions were confirmed; the *Krus* in their own dialect were discussing the serious condition of their brother and one of them threatened to get the *Accra* at the first opportunity.

There was only one thing to do; to notify the skipper to keep the *Kru's* condition a secret!

Slowly towards the forecastle Haywood advanced, but directly in his path was a tall, stately Mohammedan, who was evidently the leader of his party.

Huntingdon attempted to pass him by, but the fellow kept his stand.

Haywood was amazed. Did the Mohammedan divine his purpose? Did he belong to the same secret society as the *Krus*, a society of murderers, cruel and vindictive, dreaded alike by white men and black men?

The situation was indeed serious.

Like a flash carelessness fell from Haywood, he was the soldier, imperious and dauntless.

“Stand aside!” came his military command.

The Mohammedan moved not, but from out his ghostly wrappings a long arm crept slowly, and majestically pointed towards the west.

Every eye followed that gesture.

In the intensely blue vault of the sky a well-defined

and regular arch of dark clouds was forming about a dense white one!

Every *decker*, sailor and old coaster knew what that meant!

A tornado!

The fight was forgotten!

Men scrambled for shelter!

Gusts of wind swept the ship!

There came swift, sharp detonations of thunder, and streams of acute lightning, increasing in volume and activity.

Bending low to combat the wind, the skipper hurriedly crossed the foredeck and mounted the ladder to the bridge, crying his commands as he went. Canvases were furled and the *Nigeria* was brought almost to anchor, her prow towards the tornado. Wind, lightning and seas battled for hours, then came the calm, followed by a deluge of rain. It was just such another storm as had been experienced off Sierra Leone, but the long, monotonous voyage had prepared the tenderfeet for almost anything.

Huntingdon went below to dress for dinner, but the smell of the close ship brought on *mal-de-mer*. He hastily donned a great rain coat, and, pulling a soft hat over his eyes, he sought the deck.

In the gangway he ran into the *Jakri* and upset her. He helped her up, intending to release her immediately, but the rocking of the ship caused him to hold her close in his arms so as to keep his balance.

“Mr. Huntingdon want me?” coaxed the girl, alluringly, smiling into the white man’s face and pressing her

slim body close against his. A wave of cheap cologne assailed Huntingdon's nostrils. Roughly he set the girl on her feet, and hurried above.

Exerting all his strength, he pushed open the great storm door and stepped onto the deck. Suddenly, the door banged shut behind him leaving him at the mercy of the tornado. His hat was snatched from his head and sent sailing through space and his coat flapped angrily about him. The night was as dark as *Erebus*; wind and rain held sway and the deck was deserted, drenched and slippery. He turned to go in, but a severe gust of wind sent him spinning down the deck and brought him hard against the taffrail. It was a wonder he was not propelled overboard. Instead, he dropped into the scupper where he lay pelted by rain, washed by heavy seas and tortured by blinding lightning.

He knew he must at once make an effort to return below. Holding tight to the rail, he forced himself to his feet and was conscious of acute pain in his right hand. With his head bent almost to his knees he tried to grope his way across the deck, but the wind again blew him off his feet and inrushing seas again swept him into the scupper. On his hands and knees and digging his finger nails into the deck he slowly crawled to the door; he pulled with all his might, but could not open it.

Wind, rain and lightning continued to torture him and death threatened. He determined to make for the skipper's quarters, but a glance in that direction revealed an exposed stretch of deck over which the wind blew so violently that it were folly to attempt to combat it!

There was nothing to do but to tackle the door again.

He strained, he pulled, he tugged! The pain in his hand was intensified, and the warm blood trickled forth. He was drenched to the skin and miserably seasick! He must get the door open!

He grabbed the knob in both hands, and, planting his feet firmly against the under sill, he pulled steadily. Suddenly, the door shot open, and, had he not been prepared, he would again have gone spinning down the deck.

After the fresh night air, the smell of the close ship enhanced his seasickness, but pressing his lips hard together he forced himself below to Dr. Young's cabin.

There was a hesitancy about opening the door; Dr. Young was visibly embarrassed, and a red *Kwittha* cloth showed from under the berth. Huntingdon recognized it as the cloth worn by the *Jakri*, but he said nothing.

Dr. Young reported no bones broken, and, carefully cleansing and dressing the hand, he went into a long description about the care of wounds in the tropics. They heal slowly; sometimes never; infection has to be guarded against in every possible manner; he advised washes of permanganate of potassium.

Did Huntingdon know of the great danger of guinea worm in unboiled, unfiltered drinking water? Of the agony its removal entailed? Of the slow recovery of the patient, of his frequent death?

Did Huntingdon know about prickly heat? Of the prevalence of smallpox, syphilis? The fatality of blackwater fever? The increasing deaths from sleep sickness? The danger from mosquito and jigger bites? The constant menace from serpents and wild animals?

Yes, Huntingdon had been warned of all those things

by Wallace. That old croak had dwelt so long and lovingly upon the pleasures (?) in store for tenderfeet that every one of them, Huntingdon not excepted, had, at one time or other, imagined himself already a corpse!

“The reason old Wallace and some more old coasters have escaped,” went on the doctor, “is because even when drunk they never neglect their daily dose of quinine; they never sleep without a mosquito bar; they avoid drafts; they have all foliage cut away from their living quarters; they drink only boiled water; they allow no water thrown about; they don’t permit natives to prepare *chop* in their utensils. Self-preservation’s a habit with them. Cultivate the habit yourself, and you’ll pull through all right. Africa’s pretty bad, yet prevention and care do wonders.”

Slowly the red cloth was being withdrawn under the berth, and, when it was no longer visible, Dr. Young was greatly relieved, and, although he gave Huntingdon no chance to say anything, he talked less rapidly.

“You know, dear old chap, that malaria’s hell and it attacks the weakest part of the constitution; you must protect your ankles; wear mosquito boots all the time. Any man who don’t guard against malaria — that is the mosquito — is a fool and the sooner the world is rid of him, the better for the world. Every day at four o’clock have your *boy* put down your mosquito bar; make him tuck it under the mattress, not let it hang on the floor; scrub out dark corners at least once a month with *Jeyes* fluid. See that your bathing water’s clean; and when you tramp through swamps, wear good, thick canvas leggings to avoid *craw-craw*; it’s also hell —

comes in sores; infernally itchy, but if you scratch there's danger of infection from your nails. Nearly all natives have *craw-craw* and their quarters are beds of contagion; avoid them. Natives never isolate any infectious diseases and they'd rather hide lepers and sleep sickness patients than deliver them to the governments for treatment; it's a wonder to me a plague don't break out all over Africa and communicate itself to Europe—but on second thought, that's not likely, for the vultures eat the dead—well, hand's in as fine a shape as I can put it—come in to-morrow and I'll dress it again, and to-night better take about twenty grains of quinine and in the morning some fruit salts!"

He bowed Huntingdon out.

"The old fool," chortled Huntingdon. "I wouldn't care a rap if he had the whole *Jakri* tribe of girls under his bunk!"

The *Kru* died during the night. So secretly was he immediately consigned to the sea's depths that his death did not become generally known until after the *Accra* had been delivered to the British authorities at Lagos.

In the meantime, the rain continued, the fog horn tooted ominously, and seas were hostile. Axim, Sekondi, Cape Coast Castle, Accra and Lagos were left behind. The *mammy-chair* ceased to amuse, men were losing heart for jest, final partings were near. Already the company was noticeably smaller and men were depressed almost beyond endurance. The epitome of misery was reached the night before Forçados.

The white men were gathered in the dining-saloon; silent and retrospective they leaned on the tables or else

lounged on divans. Neither gambling nor intoxicants brought any relief from the insistence of the maddening present.

A white-clad, pale-faced steward sauntered slowly to the piano. Other times he had been eagerly importuned for music, but not so now; men were too far in the depths to do aught but gaze steadfast at the four walls of their little floating world and wish for the end of the voyage.

Listlessly the steward seated himself at the piano and his fingers wandered idly over the keys. His raised eyes encountered a closed port against which the sea broke violently. From the instrument there came an improvisation echoing the night wind and the sobbing sea; deep thunder, too, rolled forth and died away—then, evidently following the trend of the player's longing, came the piano's wail:

Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home!

The music was but a whisper, but it fell like mighty hammer strokes on quivering, sensitive hearts—

'Midst pleasures and palaces—

Men listened in silence—

Wherever I roam—

At heart-strings tugged longings so acute as to be torture—

Be it ever so humble—

The notes came slowly, softly, tremulously drawn out—

There's—no—place—

Then the crescendo of anguish was reached and the piano sobbed:

—like home!

It was too much to ask men to bear, too much! In a hoarse voice Haywood cried:

"For Christ's sake, man, something else, something else!"

Yes, anything else but *Home Sweet Home*, that heart-rending reminder of other times, other places; anything else but that awakener of remorse, regret!

Berths were sought, not for sleep, but to think, to go back over Time's pages while regret wailed dismally and persistently: *Too late, too late!*



And first, within the porch and jaws of Hell,
Sat deep Remorse of Conscience, all besprent
With tears; and to herself oft would she tell
Her wretchedness, and, cursing, never stent
To sob and sigh, but ever thus lament
With thoughtful care; as she that, all in vain,
Would wear and waste continually in pain.



Her eyes unsteadfast, rolling here and there,
Whirled on each place, as place that vengeance brought;
So was her mind continually in fear,
Tost and tormented with the tedious thought
Of those detested crimes which she had wrought;
With dreadful cheer, and looks thrown to the sky,
Wishing for death, and yet she could not die.

— SACKVILLE.

While Huntingdon's thoughts never once dwelt on death as a release from the present, yet with all his heart and soul he wished the long voyage would end with sunrise; but he knew how many more leagues had to be traversed before Cape Lopez was reached and he resolutely made up his mind to endure.

However, there were two men on the *Nigeria* who did not seem to mind the horrors of the night. They were

Dr. Young and Cartwright who threw dice until sunrise. Young lost every cent he possessed and more, for which he made out an I. O. U. with a heavy sigh.

"I'm pretty hard hit myself, old man," Cartwright consoled; "I haven't got a clear quid coming to me for months, but, I say, gimme the *Jakri* and we'll call it square."

"Right you are, old man, she's yours, but watch her; you can't trust a native woman out of your sight."

Dead slow, on the full, morning tide, the flat-bottomed *Nigeria* steamed through a mud-colored lagoon, shut in all around with mangroves and inhabited by crocodiles and hippopotami. Infinitely depressing was the heavy moisture, and, as the steamer progressed, a part of the dark wall seemed rather to recede than an opening to be disclosed — and there was Forçados: a few old hulks lying low in the water, a sad-looking light-house and several tin-roofed bungalows erected on low piles!

The place seemed the end of the earth and simply reeked with flatness and everlasting dreariness. Yet Forçados River is one of the myriad mouths of the great Niger, that river of wealth and treachery so dreaded by white men. Many of their number have embarked thereon, and few, pitifully few have returned, and those who have, bear for all eternity on their pinched faces the pallor and the weariness with which Africa marks her victim. In the delta dug-out canoes drift past and a few naked aborigines disclose themselves on the bank, their neighborhood already betrayed by the empty gin bottles which lie in the slime among the gaunt roots of the depressing mangroves. The river itself is

very wide and pea-soup in color; when a crocodile slides hideously into its hiding depths, or a fall of mud disturbs it, the splash is of some liquid more dense than water, and a swirling but no light ripples follow the disturbance. Always the river looks evil, secretive, treacherous.

And it was up this River of Hell that Longworthy and Cartwright were bound. The exiles felt the tragedy of it all, and 'midst solemn silence the departing white men took their places in the launch that was to take them to Burutu, where the little paddle-stern wheeler awaits Niger passengers.

The Mohammedans, who were bound for Ada on the River, Longworthy's *Yoruba* and Cartwright's *Jakri* were also in the launch, and the only sound that broke the brooding stillness was the puffing of the engine and the gay good-bys the departing women called to the *Yoruba* of Haywood.

In silence Huntingdon, old Wallace and Haywood watched the launch until she was out of sight. *Certes* it was, the same body of men would travel together never again, never again!

The next day at Calabar, in Southern Nigeria, Haywood and old Wallace were left behind, and to Huntingdon the steamer seemed a house of dead from which loved ones had departed forever. But many and reiterated were the promises to write to each other, and Huntingdon found cheer in the thought of such letters.

The *Nigeria* continued her way in a sea of haze, smokes offshore completely blotting out the offing and the heat daily increasing as the equator was approached. The German Cameroons was left behind, and off Libre-

ville, the capital of the *Congo Français*, the *Nigeria* anchored only long enough to discharge cargo; then the equator was crossed, the rain ceased, and at four o'clock on a brilliant afternoon in June Cape Lopez hove in sight, a glittering streak of sand, dotted here and there with low buildings set against a background of dense bush. The long, tedious voyage was ended and Huntingdon was truly thankful. Resolutely he put all unpleasant memories behind him and he turned to Cape Lopez and the future.

CHAPTER V

THE anchor was overboard and Skipper Hains cried:

“It’s the end of the earth ye might as well be, me lad, as far’s life’s concerned here and ye’ll grow rusty unless ye look sharp. And if it’s a bit o’ advice I might be after giving ye, don’t ye mind gossip, keep away from the wenches, attend to your own affairs and get out of the bally country as soon as ye can — and be remembering, me lad, that Irish Hains is your friend, come what will; he’s Irish and he’s poor, save in good wishes to his friends — and he knows the meaning of the word friend, don’t be after forgetting that ayther.”

Huntingdon grasped the honest fellow’s browned hand, but e’er he could thank him, the skipper was peering through his glasses, and, focusing them on shore, he espied two canoes putting out from the English trading houses of John Holt and Hatton and Cookson.

“Moore’s in Cookson’s gig, and Smithson, the man you’re to replace, is in the other; he’s got a white man with him, but he must be a newcomer. He’s unknown to me — but you can bet on it he’s a Britisher for the English and the French don’t mix well.”

The contrast in the three white men who came up the *Nigeria*’s ladder was great. Smithson and Moore were in white, the third man was in kakhi. Smithson was slight, highly nervous, rather refined and young. Moore was likewise young, but he was tall and raw-boned, with

a huge calabash pipe in a slit of a mouth. He walked with a swagger as confidential as John Bull's own and his fists with their great, bony knuckles looked as though they could hit. Both men were pale, startlingly so, while the third man was round, rosy, chubby, jolly and all motion. He looked and acted like a school boy out for a lark.

"Thanks, Mr. Huntingdon," said he, Sadler by name, "for landing on the beach and removing from me the stigma of tenderfoot. I've been out six months. I'm skipper of the *Oka*. She's a little Ogôwe river steamer belonging to John Holt. The jolly show's broke down and I'm living with Smithson until repairs are made. Only old Nick himself knows how long that'll be. Nothing moves out here. You'll get so rotten sick of the moth-eaten country that you'll punch niggers just for excitement."

Sadler was a tonic. Both Skipper Hains and Huntingdon were attracted to him.

Skipper Hains' blue eyes danced, and he said:

"Ah, Skipper Sadler, it's us old seadogs that can top these landlubbers every time. It's a self-appointed guarjian I've been to Mr. Huntingdon. Now I appoint ye my successor. If he don't do what's right, be after telling me when I come back, and achune us we'll concoct his punishment."

The skipper ordered champagne.

"*Vivre la France, pomme-de-terre-frit*," cried Moore.

"It's no toast like that I'll be drinking," objected Skipper Hains. "To Ireland, God bless her!"

"And to England!" added Huntingdon.

"Chin, chin!" came the hearty chorus.

"Be good and God bless ye," Hains cried as the gigs made for the shore. Then he was heard to bellow: "Sampson, make them polka dotted sons of Ham get off cargo *one time*, or I'll —"

Over Cape Lopez brooded dreariness, silence and sloth. There wasn't a native canoe in sight, nor was there any landing pier. The sea beat monotonously upon a barren beach, piled here and there with immense logs awaiting shipment to Europe.

"Behold your mansion," little Sadler shouted at Huntingdon, indicating a wooden bungalow set high on piles and surrounded by a great veranda. "And that long shed there just south of it's the trading factory. Welcome to your domain, O, Great White King," and the little skipper salamed in a truly comical manner.

On the veranda, furnished with dilapidated steamer chairs and a much-scarred table, were the servants.

"Come forth, you King of Pots and Pans, you Despoiler of Food, you Mixer of Dirt, you Handler of Secret Poisons, you Unwashed *Chef*, come forth Few-Clothes and greet your new master, the Great White King."

A villainous specimen of the Bantu race gingerly advanced. He was tall and thin and wriggled like a snake. He wore old khaki trousers and a very much soiled old white duck coat, minus buttons. Craft and cunning were written all over his brutal, repulsive face. He was uncomfortable in clothing and Huntingdon concluded he seldom wore any.

"Master, I pleased to look you," he said in guttural tones, his restless eyes on Sadler's fists.

"Down on your knees, you cannibal, you scum of hell,

and greet the Great White King proper," the little skipper bellowed in tones worthy of Captain Hains, " or I'll —" and the wag brought his fist against the palm of his hand with a resounding whack.

Few-Clothes fairly grovelled at Huntingdon's feet and shouted:

" Good night, Master, Great White King, I pleased to look you."

Sadler gave the fellow a vicious kick and told him to be off and " get *chop*¹ ready one time."

" Now Ngumbè," Sadler continued, " no chimpanzee tricks, or I'll bind you hand and foot and feed you to the *drivers*.² This is Ngumbè, O Great White King, the *houseboy* and next in importance after *Chef* Few-Clothes. He's maid of all work, the guardian of your kit, and the greatest liar and thief unhamstrung."

Ngumbè was about eighteen years of age, lithe and supple as a sapling, wearing his indifferent white ducks easily and well. He bowed low and gracefully and said in round, full, clear, pleasing tones:

" Good evening, Master Huntingdon, Great White King, Ngumbè, *houseboy* to Master Smithson, look you with pleasure for him eye; you be proper white man, proper master."

Be he thief, liar, flatterer, or any other detestable thing, Huntingdon liked the *boy's* appearance; he opined that he had grown up in the service of white men and was thoroughly familiar with their ways.

Of the three remaining *serviteurs* Sadler said:

" Them be *jack-wash*, *cook's-mate*, and that grinning ape's Mbèga, raw material just from the bush and *boy*

¹ Food.

² Carnivorous ants.

for you, O Great White King. You'll have a picnic training him, but if you don't want the job, I'll do it for you."

The *boys* grovelled in turn, and Mbèga, young, tall, thin and awkward, wearing only an old loin cloth and *ju-ju* charms entwined with his scapulars, grinned a most prodigious grin exposing teeth the envy of the most expert dentist who ever lived.

"Sunlight, where's Sunlight!" Sadler then bellowed.

"I live, Master," a deep voice spoke quietly and a big savage stepped on to the veranda.

"Me boy, O Great White King. He's black as the shades of hell so I named him Sunlight."

Sunlight bore himself with the ease and grace of an untamed thing accustomed to freedom and untrammeled space. But with the sublime was mingled the ridiculous. Over a loin cloth he wore a cast-off khaki coat of his master so small and tight that it drew back his shoulders, restricted the free use of his arms and exposed a powerful chest, the envy of the athletic Huntingdon. He looked stolidly at Huntingdon and muttered something in his native tongue. He could not speak English.

"*Dee sous*,"¹ said Sadler laconically, sprawling in a chair and extending his chubby feet. Solemnly and deliberately the savage removed Sadler's boot and stocking and with a great knife carefully dug out the *jigger*.

Drinks were ordered of Ngumbè, and Smithson took Huntingdon within to show him the bungalow.

It consisted of a great dining- and living-room with bedrooms leading off from either side. Ragged, grass

¹ Local name for *jigger*.

mats were strewn on the rough, unclean plank floor; a crude sideboard stood with feet in tins of oil and water; open doors and yawning drawers disclosed odds and ends of men's apparel *mélanged* with catsup, mustard and tobasco sauce bottles, corkscrews and drinking glasses. The carpet settee was the saddest looking implement of unrest eyes ever saw; the flat-topped desk with pigeonholes up the back was littered with, and jammed full of, papers; the crude dining table and chairs were survivals of the fittest for many a scar they bore. Bedrooms contained the scantiest of crude furniture; beds were draped in enormous mosquito bars; tin trunks, resting on split glass bottles, were piled one on the other, and soiled and torn clothing lay just where their wearers had flung them.

Huntingdon never before beheld such a drab, uncleanly, depressing, human habitation. There was not one redeeming feature, one gentle touch showing that civilized men dwelt therein. Huge spider webs and mud-houses of wasps were everywhere and the very air reeked with squalor and poverty. It was a sharp, cruel contrast to the exquisite, harmonious environment in which he was reared, and he determined to change everything when he was in full charge.

Left alone with Moore on the veranda, little Sadler cried:

“I’m for him,” and he jerked his thumb towards the bungalow. “As a rule I’m not keen on aristocrats, but you just can’t help liking this Huntingdon.”

“A bally fool you made of yourself and him calling him Great White King,” Moore sneered.

“Well, if you looked as much of a king as he does,

you'd wear a crown and be so rotten tyrannical there'd be no living with you. Gad, but he's a one-time winner! He's the real thing. He don't need to say a word, he don't need to act, he just is — and that's aristocracy."

"You bet *I'll* pump out of him the truth of his being out here. You can't make me swallow the tale that he's here for trade. I wonder what the scandal is that —"

"You've got the gall of a leopard, Moore, but it won't work in this case," Sadler interrupted. "You'll be just as wise after you've pumped as you were before you commenced and a jolly sight more tired. Ain't you afraid he'll steal your fat slob from you?"

"Go to hell," and Moore arose and looked over the drinks set on the table by Ngumbè. He helped himself to a generous portion of *pernaud*¹ then turned to Huntingdon, who with Smithson and Sadler, approached the table: "Here's a welcome to Mr. Huntingdon, good health and good luck."

"Chin, chin," responded Sadler and Smithson, then Huntingdon toasted the others.

It was sundown.

Pith helmets were replaced by large, soft, gray felt Wideawakes. Huntingdon noticed that the traders were close-shaven like convicts. He ran his fingers through his luxuriant blond hair and wondered if he'd be more comfortable if it were shorn.

In answer to his thought, Sadler said:

"I'll clip you clean to-morrow, Mr. Huntingdon; hair's too hot. You know we've got to wear a sun hat from sunup to sundown, and after that until bedtime

¹ Absinthe.

some sort of soft hat to ward off insect bites. This is a bally jolly country, I don't think."

"Oh, I say, Mr. Huntingdon, many coast beauties brought down on the ship?" Moore suddenly demanded.

"The usual number, I believe."

"Who were aboard?"

"Captain Haywood of the *Royal Irish Fusiliers*, Longworthy of the Royal Niger Company, and old Wallace of —"

"That bunch," and Moore shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. "Lots of gambling and drinking?"

Huntingdon nodded.

"Who went broke?"

"I didn't play bank, old chap," Huntingdon drawled in his laziest West-End tones.

Behind Huntingdon's back the delighted Sadler poked Moore's ribs and nudged Smithson.

There was silence.

Black night fell.

One light gleamed on Lopez Bay, just off shore. It was a red lantern on the stern of the little *Oka*.

Soon another light, a fire, leaped forth on the sandy beach. It was the watch commencing his night's vigil over the mahogany logs. Tides were high and dangerous and liable to send the logs adrift at any time.

Ngumbè lighted a lamp and set it on the table. A horde of mosquitoes immediately came to life and attacked Huntingdon's ankles. He wore white canvas low-cuts but the others wore mosquito boots. Sadler leaned over and blew out the light.

Huntingdon was led to talk of Europe and civilization, then Smithson abruptly demanded if he had brought

out many firearms and much ammunition. Huntingdon replied in the affirmative.

"You'd best declare them, then, the first thing in the morning; anyhow you've got to make official calls. I'll go with you."

"Thanks, old man," drawled Huntingdon, "but I've got a permit from the Minister of the French Colonies admitting my kit, firearms and ammunition free, also a permit to hunt any game there might be."

"Tain't worth the paper it's written on," Moore sneered. "France is far away and out here *Douanes* and *Commandants* do as they please. Best declare your stuff and don't commence by getting in wrong. The *Pomme-de-terre-frits*¹ can make it hell for you all right."

"Because you're in wrong you don't need to think that everybody else is," retorted Sadler.

"The *Douane's* a half-breed from Martinique," Moore went on, ignoring Sadler. "We've dubbed him *gourmand* because the natives must first bring all fresh foods to him and we get what's left, which is often nothing. The *Commandant* puts away a *litre* of absinthe a day."

"How much do you Guzzle?" jibed Sadler.

Again Moore ignored the little skipper, and went on:

"The *Commandant* looks like a puffed-up poodle dog, with his thick lips and waxed, upturned *mustachios*. His pop eyes are rimmed with black circles; kidneys are worked out by too many spirits. *Parlez-vous français, M'sieu Huntingdon?*" Moore's pronunciation was flat, purely Anglo-Saxon.

"*Oui, Monsieur, je il parle bien couramment,*" and

¹ The Fried Potatoes—a derisive term for the French.

so truly French was Huntingdon's pronunciation and so easily came the words that Sadler taunted Moore about his *bastard* French and advised him to stick to English.

Moore retorted by calling Sadler a beggar and chiding him for receiving the Great White King (pronounced with great sarcasm) in tattered khaki. "If you ain't got the price to get the *Loango* tailor to make you some new clothes, I'll lend it to you."

"Thanks, Angel Face, but I've no desire to wear native-made clothes and appear the scarecrow the sky-pilots are. They can wear nigger clothes, but I won't — and that reminds me, the sky-pilots are coming down from Lambaréne to the Rest House here."

"Well, I guess they won't stay long; we'll make the atmosphere so blue that they'll run back to the bush in a hurry," Moore threatened.

"As they live right next door to you, Purest of Men, one glance at you and your fat slob nigger wench'll turn the trick."

"What missionaries are coming down, Sadler?" Smithson demanded. "The bachelor with the snaky eyes or the bride and groom?"

"Bachelor nothing!" Moore cut in derisively. "He's got his black beauty just the same as the rest of us; as for the bride and groom, they may call themselves that but everybody knows the lady's an old hand at spoon-palaver. She came out here some time ago and she went from mission to mission, trying marriage *à la carte* with the sky-pilots until *M'sieu* Léon hitched up with her."

"Moore, I wouldn't have your putrid mind for all

the revenue of the French Congo," and deep disgust was in Smithson's tones.

"Revenue of the French Congo!" Moore sneered. "It's bankrupt, the *Pomme-de-terre-frits* don't make enough money to pay running expenses, so every colonial official goes it for himself, grinding the natives to abject poverty and getting all he can for himself because he fears he won't get his salary. I haven't been in trade out here ten years without finding out some things; this trade war between the French and the natives ain't ended by a long shot. I presume you've heard tell of it, Huntingdon?"

"Oh, yes. All England is interested wherever her trade is hit."

"And it's hit, all right," Moore went on. "In districts not declared open to trade by the *Berlin act*, British and other traders have been driven out and they'd been here ages before the *Pomme-de-terre-frits* were ever thought of and they brought with them the only civilization that ever came to those places. You've no idea, Huntingdon, of the poverty of this colony; natives are reduced to the slavery of beggary and dependents where they were once contented and masters."

"Is Cape Lopez affected?" asked Huntingdon.

Moore was lighting a cigar and Smithson answered:

"Yes, and no; trade can't be restricted here because of the *Berlin act*, but because of the closing of British factories in other districts, naturally less imports are brought in and less exports go out of Cape Lopez — you know Cape Lopez would have no existence whatsoever were it not the coast outlet for the Ogôwe, the greatest strictly equatorial river in the world, flowing, as it does,

hundreds of miles along the equator through forests rich in rubber, ivory, palm oil and timber. Oh, you've struck the right territory, Mr. Huntingdon, to make money out of trade, if you'll hang on and not get discouraged — but —" Smithson's voice died away; into his eyes came a great weariness and his whole figure drooped pitifully.

Sadler tried to cover up his friend's misery by bellowing: "What's the matter with *chop*? It's past eight. Come on, Smithson, let's see what the palaver is."

"Rum," Moore chortled as the two men disappeared. "You bet your life I don't permit such slackness around *my* place. *Chop* with me to-morrow night, Huntingdon, and I'll show you how to run a place."

"Thanks, Mr. Moore, but I'll see first what the other gentlemen have framed up."

"They'll come, don't fear. They never miss a chance for a decent feed; anyway, we've got to depend on each other for company; so we see a lot of each other, too damn much — Smithson's a regular fish-wife for gossip; he spreads news about everybody except himself and he's mighty close-lipped about that. He's come down in the world, it's easy to see that, and I don't believe Smithson's his real name. You can see he's a gentleman for he spouts every lingo under the sun, but he *is* an all-fired gossip."

Moore waited for Huntingdon to ask questions, to exchange gossip with him, at least to express an opinion, but Huntingdon was silent.

"Last dry season," went on Moore, "we had the great and unusual excitement of having two white ladies here

at the same time: wives of the *Gourmand* and the *Commandant*. Oh, Mamma! but they had a rummy time; I suspicion there was an exchange of *femmes*, but nothing doing so far's you could notice it. But, you savvy, virtue with the *Pomme-de-terre-frits* consists in not being found out."

Again Moore stopped, expecting Huntingdon to say something, but again Moore was disappointed.

"*À propos* of the ladies," Moore continued, "I was sure you'd bring a black beauty down with you; nearly everybody stationed in the French Congo gets a *Gabonaise* at Libreville. One educated at the American mission's the best; she's taught cleanliness and the ways of the white man; she speaks English, French and the native lingoes and she can help you a lot in the factory."

"What's the principal tribe about here?" Huntingdon abruptly demanded. Moore's gossip did not interest him save where it conveyed information about the country.

"*Ouroongo*, but don't think of taking one of their stinking, ugly women," Moore answered eagerly, mistaking Huntingdon's interest. "They're stupid too, while the *Gabonais* are the Jews of the West Coast and you can't beat 'em in trade. The *Commandant* has a *Gabonaise*; Ndio's her name. Gad, but she's a pippin! She can have me, but she looks higher than traders, but why don't *you* steal her from the *Commandant*? You're of the nobility and she'll come a-running for *you*."

"Think so?" and Huntingdon's sarcasm was so fine that Moore didn't get it.

"Boots and Saddles! There's no comparison between you and the *Commandant*! Everybody knows

you're a nabob, out here to learn the business for a year, then to go it alone. Say, there's puncheons of money in the timber business; forests're simply reeking with valuable lumber. What the devil do you want to grub for old man Holt for a whole year? Chuck it; I'll tell you how to go it alone, only I must keep under cover so's not to lose me berth. You can divide with me *sub rosa*."

Huntingdon felt like kicking Moore out of his sight. Instead he offered him a delicious *Habana*, struck a match, and held it until Moore got the tobacco aglow; then he drawled:

"Thanks, Moore, but I've one year's service ahead of me, then I'll welcome suggestions."

"Come to *chop!*!" bellowed Sadler.

"*Chop*'s generally rotten," Moore whispered, "and to-night it'll be worse for there's some palaver on."

After the blackness without, the light, which emanated from a huge, oil lamp with a white glass shade suspended low over the dining table, was blinding, and it was some seconds before Huntingdon's eyes accustomed themselves to its glare, then emphasized were the table and its contents. The cloth was rumpled, unclean and badly laid; an array of toothpicks, catsup, mustard, salt and pepper bottles, tins containing butter, milk and marmalade, a huge stack of thickly cut bread, and a battalion of wine, whisky, beer and cordial bottles were crowded in the center of the table so as to leave space for plates and the rest of the food.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Huntingdon," Smithson apologized, "for keeping you waiting your first night with us, but the *chef's* drunk."

"Don't apologize, Mr. Smithson," answered Huntingdon, heartily. "I can appreciate how it is; I dare say the best native servants are unreliable—"

"Oh, I don't know," broke in Moore. "Slack master, slack servants. The *Commandant's Loango's* the best *chef* in the whole French Congo. Why don't you steal him, Sadler?"

Marked sarcasm was in Moore's demand; he never dreamed that Sadler would take him up, but the little skipper promptly boasted:

"He's ours."

"Ah, don't count your chickens before they're hatched!" sneered Moore.

"What d'you bet I can't get him?"

"Anything you like."

"Anything I like," and Sadler imitated Moore's sarcasm. "You talk as though you owned something. Make it a tin of decent cheroots."

"Cheroots it is when you produce the *chef de cuisine*."

"Leave off the trimmings, I'll get the *Loango*."

The *serviettes* and the plated-ware were borrowed from Moore and bore the mark: *Chargeurs-Reunis*.

"Moore, you old thief," cried little Sadler. "Can't you afford stuff without stealing from the steamship company?"

"There're not mine; I borrowed them from the *Commandant*. I never lend my outfit to anybody — I know better."

"You mean you're too rotten stingy —"

"Shut up, you two," Smithson commanded. "You never meet but you scrap; let's at least have our meals in peace."

Ngumbè and Mbèga served dinner. Ngumbè wore a fairly clean white duck coat, buttoned tight, and he proved himself an efficient servant, but Mbèga was the *bushboy* pure and simple. His cloth was tied about his neck and draped only the front of his body leaving his back bare.

He attempted to hand soup across Sadler to Huntingdon. Infuriated, Sadler struck out, sending Mbèga, soup and all, to the floor, his head coming hard against Sadler's chair.

"You Monkey-Face," raged Sadler, boisterously as though he were aboard a ship in a gale of wind; then, catching sight of Mbèga's filthy hands, he rapped him viciously over the head, and bellowed: "Go wash 'em, or I'll cut 'em off."

With a run Mbèga made for the galley. He returned wiping his hands on a towel stiff with dirt, then he rammed the towel between his legs, against the bare flesh!

Cork floated in Sadler's wine. He dashed the wine in Mbèga's face, and ordered him to fetch another glass. The *bushboy* retired to the shadows, whisked the towel from between his legs, spat in the glass, rubbed it vigorously until it shone, and filled it with clear wine!

The food was plentiful and of good quality, but it was spoiled in the preparing. It was mostly from tins; the exceptions being native chicken and palm-cabbage. The former was thin and tough and Sadler complained that a sausage machine ought to be served with it. Palm-cabbage is the root of the palm tree and while it has a peculiar, fine flavor, different from anything Huntingdon had ever eaten, and is palatable and refreshing,

Huntingdon regretted that a beautiful, graceful palm is sacrificed that man might eat of its heart.

“Gad,” cried Moore in whose soul poetry and refinement dwelt not, “I’d eat my fellow man rather than starve, wouldn’t you, Huntingdon?”

“I can’t say, Mr. Moore, what I might do in an extreme case, but I don’t think I’d voluntarily starve to death if I could find any sort of nourishment.”

“People in civilization make me sick,” went on Moore sneeringly, “boasting what they’d do in extreme cases! Much they know what it is to be hungry, to be where you can’t get any food or water or even the commonest things of life. Gad, they ought to come out here to my first station at Ningè-Ningè — ”

“They ought to have been with me in the Transvaal before the Boer war and before it was civilized as it is now, when I was out there on my first engineering job,” cut in Smithson, but, noticing the eager curiosity of Moore, and resenting the hateful, familiar manner in which he drew nearer as though he would compel confession from his lips, Smithson never finished what he meant to say and Moore lost the chance of hearing the prettiest bit of gossip that had ever come his way. For, as Moore suspected, Smithson was of a good British family, a son in whom parents’ hopes were high, an Oxford graduate and a gentleman by birth, but — colonies have ruined more than one well-bred, promising young man, and they will continue to ruin men as long as colonies are what they are.

“So you were in the Boer war, eh, Smithson — ” began Moore, inquisitively, but affecting drunkenness Smithson sang:

Come where the booze is cheaper,
Come where the mugs hold more,
Come where the boss is a bit of a joss,
Let's go to the pub next door.

Ngumbè was pouring out black coffee and Moore yelled:

“ I want tea ! ”

“ Yes, give 'im tea,” answered Sadler, “ he ain't used to anything else. Hatton & Cookson feed their men tea because it's cheaper — ”

“ You're a liar,” screamed Moore. “ Hatton's much better to his men than old man Holt is — and we were the first on this coast, too — ”

“ Yes, you were slavers, that's what you were,” taunted little Sadler.

The drinks were telling on the men and their tempers were ugly.

“ So would Holt have been if he had been out in them days — ”

“ Hatton still employs slaves — ”

“ What the devil's the difference who niggers belong to so long as they work; anyhow, Smithson knows that an old-fashioned slave's a better workman than the general run of native to-day, ain't it so, Smithson? ”

“ True palaver, Moore. I say, Huntingdon, I wouldn't have a mission nigger about the place if I were you,” and again the traders broke forth in denunciation of missionaries making old Wallace's accusations mild in comparison.

“ Twas midnight when Moore demanded:

“ Gig ready, Smithson? ”

“No. *Boys* had a mighty big cargo to take off the *Nigeria* to-day; they’re in bed. Mbèga can light you home.”

“If I had known you’d be so bally careful of *your* niggers I’d have had *mine* wait — nice way to treat a guest — g’wan —” and he roughly shoved Mbèga in front of him.

“Good night, sweet one,” rollicked little Sadler.

Moore’s retort was a long, vociferous oath, and Sadler broke forth in the cockney ballad:

If her eyes could only smile,
If her lips could only speak,
But she’s only a beautiful picture
In a beautiful golden frame.

As Huntingdon entered his sleeping room, little Sadler cried:

“I say, tenderfoot, don’t forget to shake the sheets, sleep on your shoes and don’t walk about in bare feet. Scorpions, centipedes, snakes, roaches, and the terror that biteth by night are abroad — but happy dreams, if you can get them.”

To be transplanted from the niceties and refinements of an exquisite, civilized home to superlative crudity and disorder and uncleanliness, is harsh and contrastly, but, as Huntingdon tucked the worse-for-wear mosquito bar under a none-too-clean mattress, he muttered:

“It’s certainly *opéra bouffe* with all its trimmings. I wonder what Marjorie and the *mater* would say could they see me now, but what people don’t know can’t keep them awake.”

The terror that biteth by night, however, did keep Huntingdon awake, until he took several big drinks of whisky, which, combined with all he had drunk during the evening, stupefied him so that he was oblivious to everything.

CHAPTER VI

HUNTINGDON awoke early. He always did when he drank too much. He ordered Ngumbè to bring him a cold tub. The water was none too clean nor was there much of it. Huntingdon emptied a whole bottle of violet ammonia into it, which caused Ngumbè to sniff vigorously and remark:

“ Them scent be plenty fine too much. How much he cost, master? ”

“ I no savvy, Ngumbè,” answered Huntingdon, kindly, closing the door.

“ Master,” and Ngumbè’s head was stuck through the open window, “ sundown be proper time for bath for white man and water must be hot.”

“ Thanks, Ngumbè, but go away now, I wish to be alone.”

“ Me, I savvy white man palaver, plenty, plenty; me, I be proper *boy* for Mister Huntingdon, the Great White King,” and Ngumbè hastened to the galley to describe to the other servants that the Great White King bathed in a whole tub of scent, that his underwear was *past anything for fine* he had ever seen, and that the Great White King had begged him to be his own special *boy*, all of which was swallowed as truth by the others and Ngumbè was considered a very superior creature indeed!

Feeling fit and fresh after his bath, Huntingdon sauntered to the beach.

The early morning was plaintive. The skies were a soft blue, so characteristic of the equator, and the waters of the bay reflected them.

It seemed a long, long while before sunrise, but, gradually, water and skies took on warmer hues and in the east a tinge of gold appeared, communicating itself to all nature by ribbons thrown from a common center. Then rapidly growing brighter and brighter, they converged in a spot on the ocean's brim from whence there suddenly leaped a ball of brilliant fire, blinding and magnificent, as the Sun rose majestically into his kingdom!

The soul of Huntingdon responded to Nature's ecstatic call. He drank in great draughts of the salt laden air; he gazed into space unoccupied and silent; he recognized the great difference between active Europe and somnambulant Africa. Marked was the absence of the rush, rattle and roar of civilization, the throb of incessant life beating with a defined purpose; there were no streets, roads, houses, beasts of burden and vehicles; no monotonous round of engagement keeping to be endured, no heavy, sombre clothing to be worn; there was naught but freedom, total, absolute freedom. Huntingdon threw out his arms and embraced the whole world. He was as a man released from long imprisonment. He read no menace in the absence of the things to which he was accustomed; he knew only the ecstasy of the present; he was thankful that there were no distractions to interfere with his learning the business which had brought him there; he was anxious to begin work at

once for every moment well-spent brought him nearer Marjorie and happiness.

The brilliant sunlight showed up the bungalow in all its sordidness. Last night's shadows had been kind, but again Huntingdon reflected that everything would be cleaned and put in decent shape when Smithson left and he was in full charge.

For the present Huntingdon was content with ordering everything from his bedroom, having it cleansed thoroughly and his own things set up therein.

Untubbed and slattern, Smithson and Sadler came to the breakfast table. Smithson's pallor was distressing; his khakis were old and soiled; his coat was minus buttons, exposing an indifferent singlet. His breakfast was an enormous dose of quinine, coffee and brandy.

Sadler yelled loud for fruit salts; and, clouting Ngumbè over the head for failing to put them on the table, he shoved the quinine towards Huntingdon, yelling:

“Take that dope and become like Smithson: a corpse walking 'round to save funeral expenses.”

Huntingdon took the drug because physicians had told him he must if he would preserve his health.

Bad as was the dinner the night before and wretched the service, breakfast was worse. Huntingdon recognized that some attempt at improvement had been made on his arrival. Now that he was installed, he could take things as they came. The only things fit to eat were the native-grown coffee, which he took black, and the *papayes*. The latter were large, luscious, and delicious.

After breakfast, Sadler brought forth a pair of scis-

sors and on the front veranda he proceeded to cut Huntingdon's hair.

Holt's *crewboys* and passing natives gathered and in silence they intently gazed upon the curling, blond locks which fell slowly and unevenly from the dull scissors. Never before had they beheld hair which shone like the sun and curled like the young bamboo palms; it must be indeed the distinguishing mark of a Great White King!

Sadler fully appreciated its effect upon the superstitious savages, and, in solemn tones, he decanted upon the value of the hair as a charm to ward off all evil. No death could come to its wearer from secret poisons or wild beasts; sterile women were made to bring forth young; a mother could have a man or a woman child, whichever she preferred; enemies were indicated; theft guarded against; indifferent *beaux* were seized with consuming love for him or her who would be adored; the sick were healed; the afflicted were comforted; the blind were caused to see; the lame to walk; in short, the hair of the Great White King was a charm more potent than any concocted by native sorcerers and witch doctors and much cheaper!

Credulous as babes, the savages eagerly devoured every word that fell from the white wag's lips.

Sickness, death and bad luck of any sort are but different manifestations of *ju-ju* and charms are the only safe-guard against them.

Huntingdon essayed a laugh, but a sharp poke in his neck from the scissors caused him to desist. Outstretched on a steamer chair, his eyes half closed masking his amusement, lay Smithson. He loved the little

skipper and was happiest when he played the mountebank.

The first native to recover after Sadler's decantation was the officious Ngumbè. He demanded the magic hair of the Great White King. But, shoving him aside, Sadler bade the giant, Sunlight, carefully gather up the hair and sell it for a shilling the charm. The giant tucked away in his cloth a handful of hair for his own use and in the native town beyond he sold the rest of it for clay pipes, leaves of tobacco, boxes of matches and plates of salt.

Huntingdon eagerly sought a mirror. He laughed at his appearance; it completely altered his looks, and he felt sort of queer, yet comfort must be had at any price.

"I'll make a trader out of Sunlight yet," Sadler boasted.

"Better teach him English first," Smithson advised. "I presume you've recognized, Mr. Huntingdon, that pidgin English is a language in itself and it's astonishing how prevalent it is in the bush, going to prove that we British were the first to carry trade, hence civilization, into the interior and our being ousted by the French is indeed a great calamity. King Leopold's the head of this restricted trade rumpus. Not content with his maltreatment of the natives in his private domain, the *Congo Belge*, he has butted in here, ousting out everybody else but the French companies which he controls. 'Tis true that Hatton and Cookson and Holt have secured damages in the courts of Europe for loss of trade, but those damages are nothing in comparison to what the trade is really worth—but, come along, I'll show you over the factory, then we must make official calls."

The tin roof of the factory made it hot and the windows were few and afforded little ventilation. The floor was of dirt, which Sadler said was filled with jiggers and other "bally" tortures. A small selling space was partitioned off in front where goods were displayed, and the rear was used as a storeroom.

Itula, the shop boy, clad in neat khaki, was young and spoke intelligent English. He immediately recognized in Huntingdon a man worthy of respect and homage, while Huntingdon was agreeably surprised in Itula and pleased to have such a valuable assistant.

A decrepit old native followed Huntingdon into the factory and began to whine:

"I be proper frien' fer Inglees," but Sadler warned:

"Pay no attention to him, Huntingdon, he's getting ready to strike you for a *dash*.¹ Come on back and look the storeroom over."

The place was dark and Huntingdon stumbled over a pile of something soft, which Sadler explained was crude rubber. Huntingdon took a handful of it to the light to examine it. It was in small balls, of a dirty white color and of unpleasant odor. Smithson explained the method of gathering it and the prevailing market price. He decried the ruthless destruction of rubber vines and trees by the natives and the French lack of foresight in not insisting upon the nurturing of old vines and trees, and the planting of new ones. More vines and trees were destroyed in one year than could be grown in ten. "The French are not colonizers," was Smithson's final remark.

"I thought they were," answered Huntingdon.

¹ Gift, tip.

"Algiers is mightily improved under the French, I hear the Senegal is too, and look at Madagascar —"

"I've been in Algiers, Madagascar and the Senegal," answered Smithson. "They're not so well governed as they might be; their interiors continue pretty much in their primitive states. As for the French Congo, did you go ashore at Libreville, the capital of Gaboon?"

"No."

"It and Brazzaville on the Congo River are dead as door nails; and immediately outside of those two ports, bush and savagery still hold sway. Trade's fallen off enormously and the French are too short-sighted to recognize that it's all from their own acts. You can't force a monopoly in anything but absolute necessities. The black man can get along without the white man; he has demonstrated it by his life ages before he ever saw a white man, but the latter must have the co-operation of the negro. The French have made and are daily making great mistakes. Because the government has, without the leave of the native, granted exclusive trading concessions on land which has belonged to the natives from time out of mind, and because the *concessionaires* charge the natives with theft if they fell timber or hunt ivory, the negroes hide from the government and refuse to trade with the *concessionaires*. And the result? Chaos all 'round. The natives sit idle in their native towns surrounded by worse conditions than existed before a white man came among them. For upwards of one hundred and fifty years in some districts open trade has been established; the white man became a necessity; the natives became dependent upon him; they were content to gather their products and exchange

them for the trinkets of civilization, absolutely no use to them; but suddenly competitive trade was forced out and the monopolists not only put up the prices of well-known imports but substitute in their stead unknown inferior products at superior prices! Accused of theft by the *concessionaires*, and punished therefor by the government, the natives are reduced to absolute beggary. They have nothing, yet out of nothing they are expected to pay an annual tax to the government! Now the *concessionaires* accuse the government of having taken them in, of demanding an exorbitant price for territories already worked out."

"Are the concessions really worked out, Smithson?"

"No. They're destroyed, as I've explained, but plantations of rubber and oil-palms can be made and nurtured and the yield will be great; but, of course, it takes time, and the French have so impoverished themselves by bad management that they can't afford to wait, hence government and the concessions are bankrupt. Come on, we must make those calls, otherwise your kit might be searched and your firearms and ammunition confiscated no matter what papers you have from the Government at Paris."

The white men had scarce left the factory, when Makàya, the *Commandant's chef* slouched in. Sadler immediately sent Itula on a errand to a bush town which would require some hours' time. He wanted to be alone with the *Loango*.

Makàya was undersized, greasy and crafty; his front teeth were out and through them his tongue showed like a strip of red calico. He wore a flannel nightshirt, much too large, stuffed into a pair of balloon Turkish

trousers of red and blue striped madras drawn tight about his thin waist by a broad, leather belt. He was about thirty-five years of age and smug with the satisfaction of a lady-killer. For Makàya, *chef* to the *Commandant*, was an attractive dandy to the ladies of Cape Lopez. His bump of conceit was inordinately developed and tricky Sadler turned a stream of seduction full upon it.

Makàya wanted two fathoms of British print goods.

Generally, the natives had to take what Sadler gave them. But Makàya was permitted to make a selection from a number of pieces, while Sadler said, flatteringly:

“ Makàya, you certainly are a measly-looking mut, but you can *chef* to the king’s own taste, blow me pipes if you can’t.”

Makàya puffed up like a pock-marked frog under the downpour of the white man’s guile. He squirmed in his balloon trousers; he shoved his hands into his pockets; he rolled his tongue about his open mouth and his little eyes gleamed with satisfaction, but he said nothing.

“ Makàya, you look them Great White King what come for beach yesterday and what just now take walk with Master Smithson? ”

“ I look um, Master Sadler. Him be fine pas’ French-mans.”

“ Him be fine pas’ all white man; ” boasted Sadler. “ Him be big king for him country — big — white — king. You savvy king, Makàya? ”

“ Sure I savvy. He pas’ chief. He pas’ everybody for fine.”

“ King Huntingdon him say to me, ‘ Master Sadler, you fit for find me *chef*, proper *chef*? ’ ‘ I fit, Great

White King,' I tell him. I fit for make *book*¹ to send to *Loango* for get cook to come for the Great White King." Suddenly Sadler shut off the guile, and demanded:

"What else does Makàya, *chef* to *Commandant*, want?"

"*Stink water.*"

Sadler handed out a bottle of perfume so strong that it screamed through the cork.

The *Loango* sniffed it repeatedly, asked the price of it and stowed it in his shirt.

"Yes," continued Sadler, "I go now for make *book* for *Loango* cook to come. You fit to take them *book* to post office?" And Sadler reached for a box of letter paper.

"Master Sadler?"

"Umph, you want buy something more?" asked the guileless one, knowing well what was in the mind of the *Loango*.

"Me, Makàya, *Loango*, *chef* to *Commandant*, I fit for *chef* for Great White King."

"Sure, *Loango*, *chef* for *Commandant*, fit for *chef* for Great White King. But *Commandant* he never lef' Makàya go. And me, I never thief other white man's *chef*;" and in Sadler's big blue eyes was the innocence of a suckling babe.

"Them *Commandant* him pay me thirty francs month."

"Thirty francs a month!" For a *Loango* *chef*?" Emphasized was Sadler's contempt, followed by the boast: "Great White King him pay *thirty-five* francs

¹ Letter.

and him *dash*, plenty, plenty *stink water* and *pomade*, rum and *tacco* every Saturday night! Him live jus' fer *dash* him *chef*. Him be big king, proper king."

The *Loango* leaned over the counter and asked earnestly:

" You look um say so? "

" Umph! My mouth him never mek lie-palaver. But Makàya he prefer *chef* for them *Commandant*."

" Me I fear them *chicotte*.¹ Frenchmens mek plenty *chicotte*-palaver."

" And *Loango* him like them palaver and him stay by Frenchman," sneered Sadler.

The *Loango* ignored the sneer, and complained:

" *Messure Commandant*, him no *cadeau*² me *lavande* and rum."

" Them French no be proper master," condemned Sadler. " King Huntingdon *cadeau* all him peoples *stink water*, plenty, plenty, and rum, good, stiff, British rum! It pas' absinthe for fine," and Sadler smacked his lips.

" Me, I never look um so," confessed the *Loango*, sadly.

" Never look proper rum, rum pas' absinthe for fine! Poor Makàya, *chef Loango*. That's because him never *chef* for proper master. French no be proper master for black man. Him give black man rot-gut all time. Rot-gut fit only fer *nigger*.³ White King fit *cadeau* him *chef*, proper rum."

¹ French for cashing-go.

² Gift.

³ Slave. Term of great opprobrium. To apply it to a free native is apt to bring serious results.

“ Him *cadeau* him *chef* rum, rum all same white man takes? ” and Makàya’s eyes blazed with incredulity.

“ Sure.”

“ How much them rum cost? ”

“ Ah, gwan, French master never pay you plenty money for buy proper English rum.”

“ Lemme look what them bottles look like.”

Sadler brought out an unlabelled bottle. It was the vilest rum in stock.

“ White man take him? ” and Makàya puckered his cracked black lips.

“ Sure white man take him. I’ll have one now,” and Sadler raised the bottle to his mouth.

Makàya passed the back of his hand over his dry lips, and gasped, hungrily:

“ Him be fine, pas’ absinthe for fine? ”

“ Taste him and see,” and suddenly Sadler held out the bottle.

Taken by surprise the *Loango* cried:

“ Me drink all same as Master Sadler — ”

“ Yes, and all same rum what King Huntingdon drink. Put him for belly! ”

Makàya took a tremendous draught.

It nearly suffocated him, proof though he was against most trade stuff.

“ Ain’t he fine, Makàya,” and Sadler brought down his fist hard on the *Loango*’s shoulder. “ Don’t he pas’ absinthe for strong? ”

“ He pas’ all things for strong,” choked Makàya through his burning esophagus. “ King Huntingdon, him take um? ”

"Sure. White man throat be strong, *strong, strong!*"

Makàya reluctantly handed back the bottle.

"Keep him. Plenty more live for inside," and Sadler gestured magnanimously towards the storeroom. Suddenly, he doubled up, rubbed his stomach and in agony cried: "Oh, Makàya, Master Sadler he ketch sick for belly. He fit get medceen. Wait!" and Sadler plunged into the storeroom.

Left alone, Makàya did what Sadler wished him to do. He drank again and again of the fiery liquid.

When Sadler reappeared, Makàya swayed uncertainly.

"Makàya him sick for head?" asked the guileless one in pronounced sympathy. "Them rum fix you up, have some more."

Again Makàya drank greedily, then he thrust the almost empty bottle into his shirt and started towards the door, but he was so drunk he stumbled into a pile of stone-china dishes and sank among the *débris*.

Sadler closed his fists. He wanted to pommel the drunken brute, but he controlled himself. He had an end to gain.

Makàya looked stupidly at Sadler; his eyes blinked; his red slit of a tongue protruded restlessly, and from his shirt ran two streams; one of rum and the other of perfume. The clash of odors was sickening, and Makàya's head wobbled over the fumes, then he fell face down among the broken dishes.

Sadler dragged him into the storeroom, deposited him behind some barrels, then chortled:

“ You beast, if the rats don’t eat you, I guess we’ll have a proper cook. You’ll sleep past the *Commandant’s* dinner time and you’ll be too jolly well scared to brave his wrath. *Allons*, as the Frog-eaters say.” Little Sadler lightly kissed the tips of his fingers and returned to the front of the factory. He lived in a gale of jollity for the rest of the day. But it was morning before Makàya regained full consciousness. The wretch cried out his fear of the *Commandant* and begged Sadler to get the Great White King to protect him. After much importuning and many, many promises from the *Loango* never to drink again and to live only to cook the finest dishes white men ever put into his mouth, Sadler magnanimously promised that King Huntingdon would protect “ the *Loango chef*, Makàya, from the wrath of the *Commandant* and the whole damn French Army ! ”

Sadler didn’t believe in doing things by halves and Makàya’s seduction and abduction were a fact accomplished.

CHAPTER VII

IN the meantime Smithson and Huntingdon were proceeding on their official calls. The sand was so heavy that it was too much for Huntingdon, and, weak though Smithson was and consequently slow his walking, Huntingdon could not keep up with him. Huntingdon's stiff leather, tan shoes with thick soles were dreadfully heavy and impeded progress, while the hot sand burned through them and tortured his feet. He envied Smithson his light-weight, tan, soft-leather mosquito boots, which reached nearly to his knees. He had none in his kit — and he thought he had brought everything he would need. Smithson said that the German factory kept the boots in stock and advised Huntingdon to get several pairs at once.

Few natives were abroad; they stared at the newcomer with open admiration, then pleasantly greeted:

“*Mbolanè.*”

“*Aye — mbolanè,*” responded Smithson continuing his way.

“*Aye,*” came the satisfied, savage grunt, as they too continued their way, looking back and smiling, satisfied at last that a Great White King had come to dwell among them. They sensed the difference between assumed tyranny and natural supremacy. They may cringe before the former and in their heart vow vengeance against it, but to the latter they tender voluntary

allegiance, willing service and fealty — so far as they are capable of faith toward any white man. For when it comes to a crisis black men will cling together against the white man every time. Among themselves they are great respecters of caste and deep-seated are their love and allegiance to their superiors; their kings, chiefs, and headmen cannot err; theirs the power of life or death and their judgments are irrevocable. It has been so from time out of mind, it will continue to be so as long as savages are savages. Customs cannot be uprooted over night nor can the habit of centuries be annihilated with a blow, the white man's thought to the contrary notwithstanding.

To make walking less heavy, before the Government buildings of Cape Lopez, a band of chained prisoners in charge of a Senegalese *tirailleur* was strewing straw. They gave way at the approach of the white men and the guard stood attention. He was a magnificent specimen of a black man and he shouldered his carbine easily and gracefully. His uniform was dark blue, his *fez* was red with a long, dangling tassel and he was bare of feet.

The government buildings, ramshackle and badly in need of repairs, were of the low, bungalow type, set on piles and surrounded by verandas.

Smithson had sent word to the *Commandant* announcing their call at that hour, otherwise the *Commandant* might not be dressed and would refuse to see them.

A reed-grown path lead through a dusty, sandy, neglected garden to the *Commandant's* veranda, and a *houseboy* in clean whites escorted the white men to the *Commandant's* bureau — a large, barren room, con-

taining a littered-up desk, a cabinet file and some heavy, wooden chairs.

The Frenchman appeared, glowing from recent scrubbing, dressed in immaculate white and smelling strongly of perfume. Moore had correctly described him: he did look like a puffed-up poodle dog, lazy and overfed, and he was the sycophant exaggerated. He was *overjoyed* to hear *la langue française* spoken so deliciously and perfectly by a foreigner; deep was his humiliation and shame that he could not speak the *beautiful* English. With a flourish he *viséed* Huntingdon's passport; he made out with great pleasure and much ostentation a *permis de séjour* for six months, or longer, and tendered it to Huntingdon with his *plus grands hommages*; he knew Huntingdon was of *la haute noblesse, un gentilhomme* entitled to the utmost respect and deference; all of which grated false on the Englishmen and revealed the *Commandant's* peasant origin.

Then the *Commandant* lead the way to his private veranda screened with Venetian blinds of bamboo. Divans and easy chairs there were, mats and reading matter, but the place reflected the master and it was neither reposeful nor comfortable. It didn't ring true. Champagne, dainty biscuits and *Habana* cigars were served. Under the influence of the wine, the *Commandant* lamented the monotonous, barbarous country; he was *triste, misérable sans son jolie femme*; malaria and the rains had left him thin, *meagre*; Africa was so inhospitable and *la belle France si distant!* *Les indigènes* were treacherous, lazy *cochons*; they refused to pay *impôt*; they preferred to sleep *comme les bêtes* and expected France to feed and keep them. They did not appreciate

him, *le grand Commandant du Cape Lopez* who loved them like children; for punishment he wished they all had but one head that he might strike it off at a blow! He commiserated with himself until tears gathered in his frog-like eyes; he blew his nose vigorously; he poured *absinthe* into his wine glass, added much sugar and little water, and drank it greedily. Then his mood changed; he grew eloquent upon the delights of *absinthe*; it was a beautiful woman, a goddess; the grand remedy for *la tristesse*; it brought dreams more voluptuous than any material delights! *Mon Dieu, la belle Absinthe!* He who had never experienced her delights was accursed of the gods!

Several native chiefs were announced by the *boy*, but the *Commandant's* gloss had dimmed before *absinthe*, and he raged:

“Shut up, you pig, interrupt me again and I'll have you *chicotted!*”

He wrang Huntingdon's hand and cried when he bade him adieu; *le grand duc* Huntingdon must come again, and often, to relieve the gloom of the *Commandant's triste* existence; but to Smithson he said nothing, he ignored him completely.

“The old hypocrite,” raged Smithson, “had you been a mere *pleb* like the rest of us, scant treatment and short shrift for you. The French, even the best of them, don't like us and never will; and these sycophantic, petty officials lick the heels of any man above them by the accident of birth. That reptile's having another drink and perhaps off to sleep. His bureau can take care of itself. Look at Cape Lopez! Here you find the A B C of the whole French Colony! stagnation, rotteness,

barrenness, degradation. Did you ever see anything so disreputable in all your life as those government buildings; and anybody less worthy to administer the law than that creature? ”

“ They could be worse, but not much,” Huntingdon answered promptly. He believed in reputable government quarters and he detested *poseurs*.

The postmaster was a pale, sickly chap with his trousers draped mostly about his thin ankles. He, too, fairly cringed before Huntingdon; he, too, indulged in sugary speech from which Smithson was excluded; and with courtly bows and many flowery compliments he took leave of Huntingdon.

“ Puppets, marionettes, pulled by the string of caste,” cried Smithson, disgusted. “ Give me a man and I don’t care a ground-nut what his ancestry is. I say, Huntingdon, behold the Plains of Mandji,” and Smithson pointed across a flat plateau spotted here and there with scrub grass and disappearing in the distance into dense vegetation. “ There’s a Hunter’s Paradise; the playground of rare animals, some dating beyond the *Miocene* Age. Many a good tussle I’ve had there with the bush-cow, the most formidable of all animals; as for leopards, they’re so bold fire won’t keep ‘em away, and many a good shot I’ve had at them on a bright night from my own veranda. It’s nothing at all unusual for a cat to steal to the very camp fire and tear a child away. Oh, you’ll get hunting and a-plenty! I can’t begin to name all the animals, for some of them have never been named; as for birds, the air’s full o’ them.”

“ I’m awfully keen for a hunt, old man,” enthused Huntingdon.

"Best get one then before I set out for N'djolé; anyway, you might as well play while I'm here, you'll have to stick close enough when I'm gone, especially 'till you get the hang of things."

"I say, Smithson, old chap, I don't know a bally thing about trade, don' cher know." Huntingdon's frankness was that of a growing boy, his drawl that of a West-End dandy.

"Bluff it; bluff sends the world around. We never get any new lines of goods; merchandise is the same as it has been for half a century; only cash is allowed over the counter, no barter and trade at all; goods are marked in plain figures. I'll put the selling prices on the last invoices that came in; you can study them and when you've once learned them, you'll be all right; however, Itula's the wisest native I ever had about me in all—" then suddenly conscious that he was becoming personal, he cried: "Did you ever in all your life see any place so dreary, so God-forsaken, so end-of-the-earthly as Cape Lopez? This thick, dirty stretch of sand is our only promenade. You're getting a sample of walking; it's not conducive to exercise, is it?"

"Decidedly not! still, there's the sea; it is ever changing; then there are the plains and beyond them the shadowy, mysterious bush which I'm so anxious to explore," Huntingdon enthused. Stopping to pick up a cocoa nut, and pointing to the cocoanut palms, he exclaimed: "Aren't they majestic with their long fronds of dull green bending gracefully from the tufted trunks of old sepia, and isn't it wonderful that such a nutritious nut should come from such barren soil?" Then, as the odor of turpentine smote his nostrils, he looked about

and discovering a mango tree, he sought its motherly shade, and cried, feeling of the fruit which was small and hard and far from ripe, "Ah, Smithson, I don't think I'll corrode here; it's all too new, too interesting, so entirely different to what I've ever before known!"

"Enthuse while you can, old man," advised Smithson gently, "it'll soon wear off; but try to take in the meaning of this desolate beach; notice how separate, discordant are the indifferent habitations of the white men and their trade depots. I tell you, Huntingdon, if it were not for the monthly call of steamers no white man could stand this sameness. It's got me going and if I don't get away from it soon, you'll plant me here," and he stopped before a small space enclosed with a crude fence of upright bamboo splits. Depressions showed here and there in the inhospitable sand but of other mark there was none indicating the last resting place of the unfortunate white men who had gone the way of Africa and the flesh. It was a sad, desolate spot and Huntingdon wished he had not seen it. He made no comment and passed on, but Smithson complained, pathetically:

"Cape Lopez is enough of a boneyard without some fiend planting that additional reminder there to taunt us every time we pass. Huntingdon, old man, *could* anything be more depressing, more horror-begetting than that lonely half-acre, those gaunt, rattling cocoa-nut palms and the eternal sob of the restless sea casting itself in misery on the shifting sands of the treacherous beach?"

Huntingdon's reply was sympathetic, acquiescent silence.

"I must get away from here one time, I can't stand it much longer, my friend."

"All right, old chap, when you will. I'm here to relieve you and I'm ready to begin right now."

"Thanks, but there's some things I must do before I go. Anyhow, at N'djolé there's nothing but bush. The sea, the Atlantic, is some direct communication with home, and that's a lot of comfort — at — times, when its sob and eternal restlessness don't torture worn-out nerves. I'll tire of the bush too. It's nothing but reeking vegetation; your very vitals turn green gazing at it, and the torrential rains — eight months the rainy season endures — eight — interminable — hell-enduring — months."

His tones died off in a sad monotone, expressing more than did his words. Huntingdon was again vividly impressed with the white man's misery in the black man's country, yet such misery would never come to him! oh, no! He was there to gain wealth and Marjorie. He would so guard himself that Africa's onslaughts would pass him by. He was young, strong, healthy. He would put up a stiff fight. HE would NOT go under!

Oh, the faith of youth and inexperience! 'Tis sublime!

Into the *Douane's* gate Smithson turned, and again barren sand led to the very door of the bungalow.

The *Douane* immediately appeared all smiles, dressed in immaculate white and hung with medals. He was a creole, languorous, indolent, somnambulant, about thirty years of age and clothed with the soft fat that comes of easy living. His eyes were large, velvety and a rich, moist brown; his thick, dark lashes curled like a woman's;

his blue-black hair was ripples of waves; his mustache was short with up-turned ends; his complexion was *cafe au lait*; his lips were full, red, and sensual and his teeth were even, white and rounded.

A *gourmand* and a half-breed, Moore called him; an *egoist* the French would name him, but to Huntingdon he was exceedingly interesting. He was strongly individual of the tropics, part and parcel of them: the cold, gray north would blast and kill him.

He spoke the perfect English of the educated foreigner; he showed no surprise at Huntingdon's *permis d'apporter d'arms dans la Colonie Française* and he made out a *permis de chasse*, presenting it to Huntingdon with his *plus grands hommages*, but there was nothing servile nor sycophantic about him; he was a gentleman, a man of culture, refinement, travel; the first one of the kind Huntingdon met on the west coast. And white men dubbed him *half-breed!* But breeding is breeding no matter what dress it assumes or complexion it betrays.

The *Douane* led the way to his private verandah where a revelation of ease and comfort burst upon Huntingdon and delighted him. Finely woven bamboo shades hid the verandah from public gaze and permitted a perfect, subdued view of the littoral. Low, comfortable *chaises longues*, and small tables were of Madeira rattan; the floor was strewn with native hand-woven mats of rich, brilliant hues; there were the latest novels in Spanish, French, Italian and English. Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* lay open on a teakwood *tabouret*, on a *chaise longue* piled with soft cushions covered with cool, fresh linens, were Pierre Loti's *Desenchantée*, Paul Adams' *Veu d'Amerique*, and Hichens' *Garden*

of *Allah*. Water bottles of red clay fashioned like birds hung from the rafters by stout *lianes* coaxing coolness from the circumambient air. On the rear of the veranda a table was laid with a snowy-white, well-ironed cloth and set with a single breakfast service of delicate white china with a narrow gold band.

To the table the *Douane* advanced, and, at his command; “*Petit marmiton*,” a *smallboy* appeared. He was picturesque in a brilliant red cloth and headdress and a white coat buttoned up tight with a high military collar. He listened attentively while the *Douane* spoke in the *Ouroongo* dialect, then softly he placed two extra chairs at the table. The *Douane* bade his guests be seated; he begged their permission to partake of his *petit déjeuner*; he asked them what refreshment they would have. At that instant the *houseboy* appeared in a well-fitting fresh white uniform, bearing on a tray a glass of fresh milk from the cocoanut; *café-au-lait*, dry toast and a *papayè*. The visitors declared in favor of the cocoanut milk. The *marmiton*, at the *Douane’s* command, brought forth a number of the nuts, from which the *Douane* selected the best and ordered the milk extracted therefrom. The *Douane* spoke of the beneficial qualities of the milk as a morning beverage: it regulates the system, helps ward off fever, etc.; then in French he commanded the *houseboy* to take a bag of the nuts to Holt’s!

Smithson was astounded at such generosity, but he was too well bred to show it; however, when the *gourmand*, who was never known willing to relinquish anything, offered to keep Holt’s supplied with fresh vegetables — that rare boon in that country of sand and

blasting drought followed by a deluge of eight months' rain — Smithson imagined it a chimera of his fever-laden brain.

“God a' Mighty,” he exclaimed when he and Huntingdon were homeward bound, “such unheard-of generosity will simply upset the whole colony. It's the first time in the *gourmand's* history that he's given away anything to eat — as for vegetables, Lord, they're worth their weight in gold! You've no idea what garden-making is out here and how rare it is for European seeds to germinate. This generosity's the most surprising thing that's ever happened on this coast; it'll simply upset the colony!”

Sadler was delighted. He knew Huntingdon was a *one-time* winner, and with the joy of a mischievous boy, he spread the wondrous news of the Great White King's conquest of the *half-breed gourmand*. Moore was consumed with jealousy, so were the other traders, and the natives marveled what manner of a white man he was who could conquer the all-powerful and much-feared *Douane!*

CHAPTER VIII

THAT night Moore greeted his guests with cocktails already mixed and a shout to his two *boys*: “Pass *chop!*”

Although his bungalow was flush with the sand, and its veranda small, yet throughout the little establishment order and cleanliness prevailed.

A lamp with a colored shade hung low over the table, and threw a roseate glow over everything. The table was well-laid and spotless; the linen well laundered; the silver, china and glass, though of inferior quality, shone from vigorous polishing, and at each plate was this *menu*, elaborately written with much flourishing of ink:

Lentil soup.

Eggs fried in butter with sauce tomato.

Fresh fish avec sauce de vin blanc. Pati de fois gras a la Chinoise.

Lettuce with mayonnaise.

Braised celery. Grilled poulet avec dressing francaise.

Chocolate custard with whites of eggs on top.

Red and white wine, brandy, creme de menthe. Café noir. Tea.

Chocolate candy.

Despite the execrable French of the *menu*, every dish was delicious, the service first-class, but to Huntingdon *blatant* and jarring was Moore’s boasting: butter, eggs, milk, potatoes and fresh vegetables though ordinary in civilization were luxuries there; butter and milk were obtainable only in tins and were very expensive; pota-

toes cost two shillings the *kilo* from German steamers, as for vegetables, "after I heard you made such a grand-slam to-day with the *gourmand*, I sent a *book* telling him you were coming to *chop* to-night and asking what fresh stuff he could contribute. He sent the lettuce and six fresh eggs, *voilà le cutard!* "

The other three men gazed in amazement at Moore, then little Sadler cried:

"Moore, you've got the g— d'—est nerve of any white man I ever heard of! Striking the *gourmand* for *chop* when you know bally well he hates you!"

"Oh, he accuses everybody of making out false export vouchers," Moore defended. "I say, Huntingdon, this is *chop* as is *chop*, *n'est ce pas?* "

"Very fine, indeed, Mr. Moore. We must try to get a decent cook, gentlemen," and Huntingdon addressed Sadler and Smithson.

"Yes, it's all in the servants," Sadler agreed.

"Oh, I don't know, I think the man at the head's what counts," bridled Moore. "If a white man's slack, his surroundings are slack. I won't put up with it."

"Ah, *gwan*," sneered Sadler, "come up to Holt's tomorrow night and we'll serve you grub that'll put yours in the fo'eas'le class."

"Best find a *chef* first," admonished Smithson.

"Leave that to me," and Sadler thought of the abducted *Loango*. "Might as well bring up those cheroots, Moore; you'll have to pay 'em."

"You talk like a drunken man," gibed Moore. "Find a *chef*! Where'll you get him? Besides you haven't linen and dishes enough to set before even a half-breed."

“ You can’t eat dishes and tablecloths — but I’ll guarantee you *will* devour —” but Sadler got no further, for a big scorpion fell from the rafters to his head and bounced to his plate. He jumped up with a yell and commanding a *boy* to take the thing away and kill it, he rammed his wide-awake low on his head and advised the others to put theirs on too. The conversation thus drifted to deaths from poisonous insects, from snakes and wild animals, leopards in particular. Huntingdon thought the long-bowing on the *Nigeria* was pretty far fetched, but it was nothing in comparison to that now indulged in for his benefit. Sadler passed on to the tenderfoot the delightful (?) stories heaped upon him on his arrival on the coast, augmented by his personal experiences and the promptings of Moore and Smithson.

Coffee, tea, cigars and *crème de menthe* were served on the veranda.

The night was hot and still save for the insect life that sings and chirps through the African darkness and the white men were enjoying a smoke in silence, when, suddenly, a harsh, discordant bell struck near at hand, causing Smithson to start violently and to curse Moore.

“ I never hear the bally thing,” Moore defended. “ But the watch don’t know that. He sounds the bell every half-hour; it keeps him awake and the logs don’t get away with the tide. I say, Huntingdon, when you take charge, begin by being master and remaining so; give your orders and make them be carried out; a negro don’t improve by petting; once you treat him as a human being, he has nothing but rotten contempt for you, and —”

“ Who wants a sermon!” Sadler cut in. “ Come on,

Moore, order a *cashing-go* and a lantern and let's give the tenderfoot a lesson in *blackbirding*."

A short distance across the plain the bamboo shacks of the natives, with thatched roofs, stood on either side of a narrow, hard-beaten road, and the little town was wrapped in slumber, but in another second, it was awake and in panic. Sadler kicked in doors, flared a lantern in sleeping faces, and forced men, women and children into the open.

The majority of them were undraped; others had their loin cloths torn off by Moore and Sadler. The savages were forced to dance to the *tempo* of *cashing-gos* beaten lively upon their nude bodies. They took any pose and executed any movement to escape the blows of their white tormentors.

Huntingdon was disgusted. A natural, willing native dance, no matter of what *abandon*, would have interested him, but not that *banal* farce.

He turned away, when Moore flung a young girl towards him, crying:

"G'wan, Huntingdon, take her for a wife. She's a beaut."

The girl cowered, affrighted, but, recognizing the Great White King, she timidly put her arms about him and silently begged his protection. Gently, the white man lead her to her hut, put her in and closed the door.

Chivalry towards a savage woman sent the other white men into hysterical laughter and brought forth such loathsome suggestions, that abruptly Huntingdon summoned Mbèga and a lantern and went home. So stern was he that none of the others had the courage to stay him or utter a word.

In the morning Chief Ragundo of the *Ouroungoes* called with a number of his most eligible women, hoping that the Great White King would purchase one for a wife, but Smithson, then sober, spared Huntingdon by sending the old chief away with gifts of rum and tobacco for himself and his women.

Huntingdon had been silent all morning and tried to seek seclusion in his room. To ease the tension, Sadler suggested a hunt for the morrow — Sunday,— and Ogula, the shootman, was summoned.

Guns were gotten out, overhauled and loaded; belts were stuffed with ammunition and a start at four in the morning was agreed upon.

As it was then Saturday afternoon, Smithson and Sadler, accompanied by Huntingdon, went to the factory to help Itula pay off the *crewboys*.

Huntingdon got his first lesson in native trading. Although the natives were eager to exchange their wages for the white man's goods, they haggled so long and changed their minds so often that the white men lost their tempers and consigned them to perdition and eternal torture by way of shoving them none too gently out of the factory. Instead of driving them away, it caused them to return; their decisions were prompt and soon the tiresome week-end business was over with.

Keenly interested, Huntingdon stood to one side, towering head and shoulders over the other white men. Sharp, too, was the contrast between them and him. They wore old singlets and trousers and indifferent suspenders; their great felt hats were pushed far back on their heads, they were soaked with perspiration and plainly disturbed by the heat, the exertion of trading

and the actions of the natives. If the heat depressed Huntingdon, he did not show it. As usual he was in fresh whites and well-groomed, his pose was indolent, graceful and easy, but his eyes and mind were active. Those were the people who must aid him wrestle wealth from their land; he must know them, if he were to succeed — and succeed he would for he had set his mind upon it and for a man of his determination to aver is to do. Something of the meaning of the tremendous task he had taken upon himself was slowly dawning upon him, and, like the men of his race when combat is imminent, he was girding his loins for the fight. He had to go it alone and he determined to conserve all his energies for the effort.

He had not the slightest idea what tremendous effect his imperious looks and seemingly indifference were having on the natives. His thoughts were not once on himself, but on the work ahead of him, and when men and women murmured towards him:

“*Tata otangani Huntingdon,*”¹ he not only did not know the meaning of the words but he never once suspected that it was their voluntary acknowledgment of his superiority and their acceptance of him as their Great White King. But Sadler and Smithson knew the meaning of those words and the actions of the natives, and when, at sundown, French, Belgian, Swiss, and German traders called to welcome Huntingdon to the coast, little Sadler took great pains to tell them all about the sensation Huntingdon made and the unsolicited homage the natives rendered him.

Moore swaggered in at dinner time. He was posi-

¹ Huntingdon, Great White King.

tive Sadler had found no cook and he was fully prepared to demand the immediate payment of the cigars. Great then was his astonishment and chagrin when promptly at 7:30 Makàya sent in an excellent dinner and proved himself to be the best *chef* in the whole of the Congo Français. Moore paid his loss with good grace, and, although he could not coax from the little skipper how the *chef* was secured, when he left, Sadler told the whole story in detail to the others and sent them to bed laughing and happy.

At four o'clock Sunday morning, Huntingdon and Ogula were on hand all ready for the hunt, but it was noon before Sadler and Smithson arose. Sadler explained he wouldn't hunt on Sunday — not because he held sacred the day — but that he "wanted to get one in on old man Holt by hunting on a work-day." Smithson confessed that he was too nervous to hold a gun, but both white men solemnly promised to set out early the next morning without Moore, who was never known to keep appointments or promises.

Again Ogula was admonished to be ready in the morning "before sun he ketch for top and while moon he live."

The stolid face of the big savage betrayed nothing of his thoughts, but, when Huntingdon asserted that he must hunt if only for the exercise, Ogula drew himself up, and, looking full into the face of Huntingdon, said earnestly:

"I savvy, King Huntingdon. Ogula live for come."

Sadler was highly pleased at Ogula's evident liking for the tenderfoot and he remarked to Smithson that it was well Huntingdon was in the service of John Holt

else he would have all the natives begging him for work and trading with him to the detriment and loss of the other trading houses.

The Sunday afternoon dress parade was the largest and most gorgeous Cape Lopez had ever seen, all on account of the Great White King, whose fame was spreading throughout the land.

The wives of the white men were conspicuous in mother hubbards, but no petticoats stood out as at Sierra Leone and no wads of fat were distorted into bunches as was the case with the corsetted native women who had boarded the *Nigeria* off Calabar in Southern Nigeria. The majority of the Cape Lopez women wore new, bright loin cloths, turbans made from gaudy silk kerchiefs, and tightly rolled black, European umbrellas *balanced crosswise on their heads*. Men were clad in odds and ends of cast-off European attire; new and old trade cloths; flannelet nightshirts and singlets. One dandy was conspicuous in a brilliant red trade cloth, a khaki coat with huge brass buttons, a white plush high hat and a walking stick thick as a bludgeon. Every head turned to look after him, and at either side of him trotted a boy and girl aged about four, nude as the day they were born. Smithson explained that no matter how keenly the winds blew, children were seldom bundled up, while their elders not only put on all the clothing they possessed, but wrapped their heads and throats with woolen scarfs and at night all negroes slept with their heads towards the fire and their feet out in the cold.

The European hat of a by-gone period led to a discussion of the trading days in the Sixteenth Century

when wily Dutch merchantmen exchanged old hats and *perukes* for rubber, ivory, beeswax and the strands of the elephant's tail. From the latter necklaces and bracelets are made and so universally are they worn by natives of all ages and sexes that Smithson opined they were the oldest jewelry extant. "It's strange," Smithson concluded, "why such a huge creature as the elephant has such a small tail and why a tiny monkey has such a large one."

"I know why," spoke up Sadler after the manner of a small boy eager to reply to a question of the teacher, "monkeys need long tails to swing from tree to tree when promenading, but if an elephant had as long a tail as his big body entitles him to, when the *drivers* are on a rampage, every creature from a cockroach to a leopard would leap on the fleeing elephant's tail and the poor beast would be so overloaded that he'd drop down and then the *drivers* would *chop* him tail and all; so the first elephant mother, wise in her generation, broke off the tail of her first daughter and exacted from the child an oath to continue the practice with her daughter and thus send the custom down through succeeding years; so when the *drivers* come and every living thing flees for its life before them, the elephant has as good a chance of escape as has a snake or a leopard or an antelope."

"And where might you have gained such wisdom, my dear Sadler?" Huntingdon asked, amusement and affection in his tones.

"I not only took it in with my mother's milk but I learned it from countless *bob-hang-overs* at London music and concert halls and from six-penny popular editions for which all my boyish earnings were spent and

for which extravagance I got many lamb-bastings from my darling mother; which said beatings were so frequent that at night I never could sleep until two things happened," and Sadler stopped to light a cigarette.

"What things?" demanded Smithson, like Huntingdon highly interested and admiration and affection apparent in his voice.

"I got the beating and said my prayers."

"No doubt you deserved the beatings," laughed Huntingdon.

"I was the biggest devil the Lord ever let live without punishing him — unless you call my being here in Hell's Playground punishment, and I came here of my own accord because not a living soul is left me at home," then, conscious that he was growing sentimental, he cried comically: "O Great White King, have you noticed what perpetual hunting the niggers find in their own wooly heads and how they are always slaughtering game, preferably in the sight of the white man?"

"Yes, I've noticed it and I'd clip every native's head close, if I could —"

"Don't do it!" broke in Smithson; "leave something to the imagination."

The Dress Parade continued until sundown. All Cape Lopez knew that Huntingdon had not yet selected a wife and every woman considered herself a candidate for the position and was out in all her finery hoping to arrest his eye. Back and forth they paraded slowly, stopping now and then to glance back, presumably to see who was following or what was happening behind, but in reality as an excuse to linger in front of Holt's bungalow. Because of the heat and the sun's glare the white men

were not visible, but the keen eyes of the savages discerned their white-clad forms behind the bamboo shades.

However, there was one woman in Cape Lopez who did not participate in the exhibition and Sadler and Smithson remarked her absence.

She was Ndio, the *Gabonaise*, mistress to the *Commandant*.

“She’s too imperious to indulge in any such vulgarity,” said Smithson.

“A good-looking woman don’t have to chase a man — he does the chasing,” said little Sadler. “I say, Huntingdon, this *Gabonaise*’s a hummer. Take her from the *Commandant* — all’s fair in wench- and trade-palaver out here, and she won’t be nearly so hard to seduce as was the *Loango*. I confess, however, Moore, Smithson and yours truly had a go at the seduction game, but she wouldn’t even turn her nose up at us; we’re not in her class. She goes in only for the best, and as you’re a topnotcher and a really truly Great White King, send for her and she’ll come one time.”

“Think she would, old chap?” remarked Huntingdon, highly amused. “I’ll look her up at the first opportunity and make a proposition of marriage to her —” all of which he had no intention of doing. Not that women did not appeal to him, but he meant to be true to Marjorie; besides, he needed all his vitality for the battle ahead of him.

Sundown brought Moore, polished and clean and redolent of trade scent. He didn’t even take the trouble, so he explained to Huntingdon, to arise for the hunt; he knew Smithson and Sadler had no notion of going;

however, *he* would take Huntingdon alone to the bush on the morrow; *he* was never known to "break a *rendezvous* or fail a friend."

"Rats!" was Sadler's terse ejaculation.

CHAPTER IX

HUNTINGDON was sound asleep when a light touch on his arm startled him and caused him to reach for his revolver, but a hand stayed him and Ogula whispered:

“Master, moon he die. Time tek walk fer bush. Me, Mbèga, Ora, ready, one time.”

By the aid of a lantern, Huntingdon silently and quickly dressed. He felt like a convict without his morning tub, but he was trying his best to comply with Africa’s ways.

Shouldering his magazine rifle, he set forth.

On the veranda he paused, fascinated by the scene before him.

Black night still reigned, but on the beach there leapt forth a blazing fire, around which were gathered shades, large, repellent and unnatural, like demons from the underworld plotting man’s destruction. It was the watch’s fire about which were gathered Ndatura, the watch, Ogula, Mbèga and Ora.

Huntingdon advanced boldly. Though his feet made no sound on the heavy sand, the savages were aware of his approach. They received him in silence. Mbèga took a kettle from the fire and poured hot coffee into a tin. Unhesitatingly, as though he had never heard of secret poison, the white man drank the coffee.

The eyes of the savages were full upon him. Never did he look so noble, so fearless; never did the blood of

his proud ancestors so gloriously show itself! Tall and magnificent as was the savage, Ogula, the white man held his own. Each was an excellent specimen of his race: the crude, unlettered bushman, and the hyper-civilized white man; one a slave to fetishism, degrading superstitions; the other a product of civilization, an observer of God's laws; one of the equator with its torrid heat and blasting sun; the other of the north with its cold, gray winters and delightful summers; one, unclothed and revelling in that nudity; the other clothed from head to heel and comfortable in that clothing; one, as black as the shades of night and as mysterious; the other, white, like the day, to be read by him who would.

Huntingdon became conscious of the uncanny stillness of all things and the insistent stare of the savages.

The Bay of Mandji, as the natives call Lopez Bay, was a vacant, silent void, save, now and then, when its waters stole on the beach with a sigh, as though a restless soul had found repose, while the fire's red glow emphasized the size and brutality of the savages and glinted along their keen hunting knives peeping from out their cloths.

Mechanically, Huntingdon's fingers felt for the trigger of his gun. According to habit, when he set out, he was well provided with gold. Had Ogula seen it and had his murder been planned?

Suddenly funereal wings scraped over Huntingdon's helmet; and, at the same moment, an unearthly scream came from the bush beyond!

Fear, absolute fear, held this son of the Bedfords and the Granvilles. Fear of the unknown: Africa's

sleepless mystery and her peoples ; that thing encircling his head, and the weird cry from the shadowy bush !

Huntingdon longed to slay the creature over his head, but he had not the strength to move a muscle ! Like one petrified he stood, his eyes in the eyes of the savages.

The fire seemed to glow brighter ; to hunt out his cowardice, to expose it to those stolid, silent, observant savages. He suffered eons of misery. Then the thing above his head flew into the fire.

It was a bat, only a bat !

Again came the unearthly screech from the bush, and "Plantaineater!" Ogula, the savage, grunted.

Huntingdon was himself again. Lightly he held forth the tin for more coffee.

Then Ogula delivered a speech, slowly, deliberately and impressively, evidently the verdict of a conference.

"Master Huntingdon, him be proper white man. Me, Ogula, and Mbèga and Ora and Ndatuma be him proper friends."

"Aye," grunted the others.

Thus Huntingdon passed muster with the savages. Not only were his height, his kingly bearing, his apparent fearlessness, his blond beauty extremely impressive in the fire's light, but his hunting togs confessed a knowledge of hunting, of the bush and its ways. His suit and helmet were of dark green khaki, which harmonizes best with sandy wastes and dank jungle. Had he come forth in staring white or in yellow khaki, like most tenderfeet, a shining target for skulking game, the savages would have grunted their contempt and followed him begrudgingly.

Ogula said something in the native dialect, and,

through throbbing somnambulance, along the heavy, sandy beach, Ora led the way, carrying a lighted lantern.

All was silent and dark within the few habitations of the white men. No guard stood before the *Commandant's* and the *Douane's*.

How easy it would be for the savages to steal upon and rid themselves of their oppressors! Huntingdon wondered what stayed the hand of the black man. Their present condition under the French government was not a comfortable one and it was growing daily more intolerable.

But Huntingdon's thoughts did not dwell long upon the black man's sorrows. With every step he took the wine of life flowed more blithely through his healthy veins and the spirit of adventure was quick with him.

He was off on his first African hunt; to penetrate for the first time the primeval world of which he was totally ignorant; to pit his training against the natural cunning of its denizens.

He wondered what game he would bag. He hoped he would get an elephant and a buffalo; he longed to take back to Holt's big game worth while. Recalling that he was in the gorilla country of Paul du Chaillu, he wondered what he would do were he to meet a gorilla face to face! Great indeed is the creature's strength, and the rencounter would not be a pleasant one unless Huntingdon sighted him at a distance great enough to blaze away with his .303 loaded with soft-nosed bullets. And the monkeys? Would they throw cocoanuts at him, and why couldn't he trap a number of them, teach them to play polo and take them home with him for the amusement of *ennuyéed* men and women?

Marjorie should have all sorts of interesting creatures. He would start them to England in the early spring, so that they would have the summer months in which to become acclimated. He would have to send something else than birds and animals to his mother; she did not like animals. She tolerated the hounds only because they were part of their country life. If he only had the hounds with him now! Would they not point the game? But, alas, the equatorial sun would compel their being tied up in the shade all day long, and to an animal a leash is torture. No, they were better at home; so were his polo pony and Bryce, his valet. But his mother and Marjorie could not understand why left behind were the animals and the valet and other things to which he had all his life been accustomed. Was Africa not like India, with all the niceties and sociability of diplomatic circles? Was he not off for a ripping good time among civilized men and civilized surroundings? Oh, yes, he was off for a ripping time, 'midst enchanting surroundings, but the voyage out was such a long one he did not care to have the hounds and the pony he loved submitted to close confinement on ship-board, and as for Bryce, he was old and his wife was blind and his place was at home with her. Anyhow, there were many trained native servants and Huntingdon would have as many of them as were necessary for his comfort. So the truth was kept from the two human beings Huntingdon loved best and they had not the slightest idea of the real environment in which he was to dwell for the next three years. His letters written on board the *Nigeria* spoke only of the interest

of the long voyage — as Huntingdon viewed it from Liverpool to Sierra Leone — and after that he invented pleasantries.

These thoughts, too, were brushed from his mind, for, like the men of his race, body and soul he surrendered himself to the thing at hand. So to the bush he marched blithely, whistling merrily, to the delight and wonder of the savages, for they do not whistle.

Nor was he ruffled when he found Moore still asleep. He reveled at the chance to go alone into the bush with the savages. Suppose they did murder a white man for a mere blanket; suppose they murdered him now for his firearms and the money he had about him? Every hunt has in it the danger of exploding firearms and attacks from wild beasts and serpents. Multiplied dangers only enhance the joy of braving them.

Huntingdon tried to make himself clear in the little pidgin English he had picked up.

“Ogula, you fit fer tek Master Huntingdon for bush for look bushcow? ”

“I fit, Master, proper fit,” and Ogula reared his head proudly.

“You savvy them bush, Ogula.”

“Me? I savvy him proper. Me, I be proper shoot man *mpolo, mpolo*.¹ Me I mek so aver since I be small boy all same so —” and he measured a trifle above the white man’s knee. Then, with eloquent gestures and in low, guttural tones, he pantomimed game, little and big, timid and bold.

Huntingdon instinctively read human beings; let

¹ Great, great.

Ogula be otherwise a murderer, a liar and a thief, there was no doubt he was bold, strong and experienced in woodcraft.

“Master fit gimme me ‘nuther shootman?” he suddenly demanded.

“I fit.”

“We look um,” and Ogula led the way south along the beach to some rude huts hidden among the bamboos and mangroves. In one of them he held short converse. He emerged, followed by a savage larger and more magnificent than himself. He, like Ogula, wore the scantiest of loin cloths, but, instead of a gun, he was armed with a long spear, pointed with iron.

“Him be my proper brudder, Master,” explained Ogula, proudly. “Him and me have all same mudder and fadder. Him name be Nkömbi Kakhi. We be *Nkömis* from Mboué. Him savvy Englis for him mouth, all same like me, Ogula, him brudder.”

“Good evening, Master Huntingdon, *tata otangani mpolo*,” said Nkömbi Kakhi solemnly. “I be proper shoot man, all same like my brudder, Ogula Kakhi. I fit fer take walk for bush. *Fouru mbani, mbani*,” and he held four fingers before the lantern.

Huntingdon comprehended he was naming his wages for the day. They were four something, but what, he had no means of knowing.

“*Fouru mbani, mbani* be all right,” he agreed.

“Aye,” grunted Nkömbi Kakhi.

Without further palaver the line of march was formed, and, in single file, the men started for the bush.

Nkömbi Kakhi led the way; then came Ora with the lantern and Huntingdon’s scatter gun; Ogula with his

blunderbuss on his shoulder and a bark powder box slung across his broad back; Huntingdon with his rifle, and, last, Mbèga with a *chop* box on his head and several sticks of *manioc* dangling from his neck.

The one-man-wide path zigzagged across the Plains of Mandji, and not a word was spoken. The stars were large and near, scintillating like great arc lights, and, now and then, one of them plunged headlong into limitless space.

How strange it all seemed: no hunting party in pink and spurs; no horses, no dogs, no retainers, none of the *fanfare* accompanying a made-to-order hunt at home, where men ride recklessly after hounds to round up a lonely fox, or a hare, or possibly both!

Suddenly a dark wall arose.

“Bush,” grunted Ogula, the shootman. “No fit to look um ‘till day he ketch,” and he dropped on the ground, followed by the others.

The minutes dragged slowly.

The night chorus swelled louder and louder: frogs, crickets, cicadas, katydids, sang in tuneless stridulation, insistent and rasping.

In the bush beyond there was a cracking of twigs, betraying the prowling of wild beasts; suddenly, a monkey screamed like a frightened woman; a hyena laughed in harsh staccato, and the thin cry of bats was followed by a cough, on the ground and near at hand.

“*Njego*,” muttered Ora, in an awesome whisper, hastily smothering his light.

The heads of the savages bent low; they listened with every sense alert, their hunting knives ready.

Huntingdon never knew how close death was as a leopard slunk by intent upon a gazelle.

Then there came a cracking of twigs, the startled, sharp cry of the gazelle, a short struggle, and the rapid flight of the bush cat.

The savages relaxed ; they stretched full length on the ground ; danger from that source had passed.

Silence fell, deep, profound, terrible. It held more menace than did the pulsating, unseen life so suddenly and mysteriously hushed.

The savages were so quiet they might have been part of inanimate nature herself.

Night's dewy breath burrowed to the very marrow of Huntingdon's bones. Yet he feared to shiver, feared to break that all-embracing, terrifying stillness. It had fallen swiftly and without warning as though some monster had gripped all nature by the throat and throttled her before she had time even to gasp !

Huntingdon felt the superiority of the savages. They rested, tranquilly and naturally, while he was agitated and unnatural. If now, in the darkness, in that clammy stillness, he must needs battle for his life, what availed the schooling of civilization against the natural cunning of the savage ?

After all, what *is* civilization ? Can it overcome death when the final summons comes ? Can it alter one little law in the vast infinite ? On the threshold of the Great Unknown does the civilized not suffer more acutely than the savage ? His the power to conjecture the hinted-at might-be's of eternity. Save where the witch doctor, the sorcerer and secret poisons are concerned, the savage knows no mental torture, he knows naught of

the agony of the sins of commission and of omission, the dreadful knowing of hydra-headed Remorse! Is he not then superior to the white man? Does not his very savagery, his ignorance, clothe him in a sort of bravery impossible to the civilized? Huntingdon's thoughts suddenly failed him, for, without warning, a cry, sharp and shrill, cut the uncanny stillness, and Huntingdon shivered with fright. He held his breath, waiting for he knew not what, when other cries of the same *timbre* followed, and a flock of partridges flew from their roosting place!

"Day he ketch," and Ogula pointed towards the east.

Out of the womb of blue-black night there crept an ethereal blue, that blue that makes of Africa a dream-world of entrancing delights; a creation of Merlin, the magician, where shadows are noiselessly banished and into being comes day's countless glories.

Drowsily the bay awoke from the arms of Shadow-land. It stretched itself languorously and amorously. Its impressionable bosom reflected the sky's soft coloring, while away off, towards Fetish Point, whitecaps danced, where bay and ocean met.

Again the pageant of morning enthralled Huntingdon. He would have liked to dream on, for several hours until the sun arose, but in the bush the chase beckoned, and the savages were already on the march.

"Plenty beef tek walk," exclaimed Nkömbi Kakhi, his eyes keenly searching the plains. "Master fit fer tek plenty, *mpolo!*"

Huntingdon hid his amazement as signs unnoticed by him were readily interpreted by those men of the bush. Yet all his faculties were at work. He determined to

learn the ways of the wild folk ; to fashion his behavior after that of the savages, for he realized that hunting in Africa was a science in itself.

He followed the savages into gloom and dampness ; the air was heavy and foul ; his new, leather hunting boots slipped repeatedly and he would have fallen but crowding vegetation at which he blindly clutched kept him upright. The path was narrow, and he could not see it ; he wondered how the savages went along so rapidly and sure-footed and how they protected their eyes from the swaying overgrowth. He lowered his chin and let his stout helmet bear the brunt of it. He felt as though he were burrowing after some beast through walls of dense growth which threatened every second to close in upon and smother him ; he was drenched to the skin with perspiration and the heavy dew which dripped all about it as though it were raining ; but not a protest or sign of weariness escaped him as he followed close on the heels of his guides with Mbèga just behind him.

Gradually, the shadows lifted and revealed was the jungle !

Time and time again had Huntingdon tried to picture the primeval bush, but not once had his mental camera registered anything like that Garden of Nature run riot. The growth was astonishingly dense, forming galleries intricate, shadowy, mysterious and leading far away. There were labyrinths within labyrinths, a network of tangled vines and creepers decorated lavishly, wantonly and superbly. Not the slightest thing, high or low, was acquit of burden-bearing : stems of trees, fallen logs, and interlaced *lianes* contained worlds of their very own, as green upon green and all shades of green were crowd-

ing, pushing, fighting for space, climbing up and ever up away from density, shadows, foul miasmas and dank, reeking vegetable mold towards the heights where the sun shone and winds frolicked and the rains fell.

The lush and reek of green, of every hue and shade, would have depressed, repulsed, had not artistic Nature blended with it bold splashes of brilliant, harmonizing colors. *Ipomeae* shaded from palest blue, through all the shades of the prism to deepest red; broad-leaved *Hibisci* flowered with white and yellow blooms; deep yellow *Thunbergia* and gorgeous-hued *Convolvuli* peeped forth here and there and everywhere; great mangroves blushed in scarlet berries and silk cottonwoods rollicked with bursting, downy pods. Timid orchids of various hues encouraged by bold elephant-ear ferns, a sort of lichen that grew to the trees, crawled up and ever up to great heights where garlands of aromatic jessamine swayed to and fro in the very ecstasy of life and where the climbing *calamus* palm, a dainty, green fringe hung in fascinating festoons, forming the crowning glory to the parasitical growth of bizarre forms which everywhere arrested the eye and impeded progress!

Huntingdon stepped aside to possess himself of an *Argræcum* orchid.

Crash!

He wallowed in mire which clung to him like axle grease. He regained his footing with difficulty. What looked like solid earth was but dense growth masking malodorous, pestilential underworlds, grawsome and repellent, the home of creeping, crawling, eyeless things, the grave of bloom and leaf and shrub and tree!

But never was grave so cunningly and fascinatingly hidden.

There were thorny shrubs; prickly smilax; stout reed *Costus*, fully fifteen feet high; gigantic clumps of gray-green grass; purple-leaved *Cissus*; aloes blushing in coral reds; masses of *Zingeberaceae* and *Arums* with gorgeously colored leaves 'midst a perfect wilderness of stemless ferns drooping like huge plumes and swaying at the slightest touch of human or of beast.

Trees were many and diverse; of all sizes and shapes, health and vigor, youth, and old age, decline and death! Termites, too, were there, always hungry, never satisfied, never at rest! Time, too, demanded his toll. Many died that fewer might live. The battle for the survival of the fittest was relentlessly and continuously fought; life and death walked hand in hand; the seared, the yellow, looked over the shoulder of youth and bloom; autumn and summer seasoned together as growth upon growth, a hungry horde, an army of green, fought for life and supremacy, 'midst dull obscurity and eternal gloom and foul-smelling, poisonous vapors!

Huntingdon reveled in it all — now depressed when sinking in mire and leaf-mold, now elated when on firm ground he stopped to admire the different blooms, delicate, fragile and *without perfume*.

He wished Marjorie were with him to enjoy it. He knew he could never effectively describe it to her for to no human is given the art to paint Nature in all her *nuances*, to tint with words a faithful reproduction of the real!

Nkömbi Kakhi stood silently by Huntingdon as he examined the bush. Unknown to the white man, the

black man's keen eyes pierced shadows underneath and overhead. Danger was everywhere! above and below, and roundabout; it might come any second, from any direction and the savage was acutely alert.

A strong, disgusting odor assailed Huntingdon's nostrils, overpowering even the jungle's dank breath.

"Him be cat," explained Nkömbi Kakhi. "White man call um civet. Plenty live." Then, after a pause, the savage said, with pride: "Black man too, him got name for all t'ing what live for we country."

Huntingdon smiled inwardly at the simplicity of the great bushman. He was as a child enumerating his toys and naming them.

A plaintive cry came from the gloomy depths, followed by a quick rustling, coming nearer.

"Monkey live," whispered Nkömbi Kakhi, as a small, yellowish monkey looked mildly down. Then a white-nosed monkey, a red-headed monkey and a black monkey became visible, but, startled at the presence of human beings, they leaped from tree to tree, scrambled over tangled vines and were gone.

"Gorilla he live too?" questioned Huntingdon.

"*Njina* live one, one. Him mek roar so"—and Nkömbi Kakhi roared deep and long. "Pas' lion for strong."

"Chimpanzee, he live too?"

"Plenty, plenty."

Nkömbi Kakhi was again in the lead, and Huntingdon followed.

"*Nchouna, nchouna*," the savage suddenly shrieked with terror and was off like mad.

Huntingdon stood still, paralysed with fear.

Was a leopard overhead making ready to spring, or was a deadly cobra spitting at him from below!

He was not long in doubt.

On his entire body he felt sharp, painful stings. Red-brown ants swarmed all over him. At his feet was the army he had routed. There were millions of them!

Huntingdon recalled old Wallace's croaking about the *driver ants*, corroborated by Sadler, Smithson and Moore. Woe to the human being who fled not at their first sting. He never lived to flee again! He was devoured and his bones picked as clean as though jackals had been at work!

No doubt about it; the *drivers* could bite.

“*Nchouna, nchouna!*” warned Nkömbi Kakhi from a safe distance. “*Mek so,*” and the bushman gestured for the white man to leap.

Huntingdon did so.

But the stings went with him. They became intolerable.

“*Fit to tek them so,*” and Nkömbi Kakhi indicated that Huntingdon must strip himself.

Huntingdon's impulse was to scorn the suggestion. But he was glad to comply and let Nkömbi Kakhi help kill the *drivers* on his body and rid his clothing of them.

Some distance ahead, the rest of the caravan reposed upon a fallen log.

“*Nchouna,*” briefly explained Nkömbi Kakhi.

The delay was sufficiently accounted for.

The march proceeded for some time in silence.

“*Crack!*” it was Ogula's gun that spoke, and at a sharp command from the savage, Ora was off like an arrow, bending low the better to pass through the

tangled growth, while Ogula kept up a running conversation with him, advising what direction to take and what he would find.

Then Ora uttered one word, and Ogula announced:
“ Him be leopard. Ora look ‘um.”

Huntingdon masked his impatience for his first sight of an African leopard. He had been told it was more handsome than the Asiatic, its spots being very distinct and clear and the coloring more pronounced. He heard Ora returning through the brush, the twigs breaking under his feet, and Huntingdon wondered how one man could carry a leopard. Verily the savages did strange and wonderful things!

Nearer and nearer came Ora; he was close at hand, and great indeed was Huntingdon’s surprise when not a leopard, but a great eagle was laid at his feet! Its breast was spotted like a leopard’s and it measured fully seven feet from tip to tip of its wings!

“ Him be leopard of the air and him name for we peoples be *guanionien*,” explained Nkömbi Kakhi. “ *Guanionien* mek so,” and he worked his legs and arms indicating high, rapid flight. “ Tree *mpolo, mpolo*, never ketch him feet. Him live for top, so—” and straight and high went Nkömbi Kakhi’s arms.

The bird was left behind, and the march proceeded.

The path led into a mangrove swamp where giant trees with countless branches like wriggling snakes crawled in all directions. Huntingdon’s ankles were twisted and tortured from slipping upon the slimy feelers, which, like the fingers of gaunt skeletons, grasp and overthrow the unwary. He was infinitely relieved when his guides plunged into a morass covered with

papyrus fully eighteen feet high and emerged on the bank of a picturesque rivulet diapered with duck weeds, water ferns and ambatch.

The savages balanced themselves on one elbow, and drank deeply of the running water. The ambatch was in full bloom, and Huntingdon stooped to examine its orange-hued flowers, when he drew back, fascinated by a brilliant monitor lizard, fully six feet long which lay asleep in the shade, and by the nose of a crocodile dangerously near. He had no desire for intimate acquaintance with the man-eating saurian, and he quickly moved to the side of Ogula. The latter pointed to a broad depression which showed plainly through the papyrus on the other side of the stream and grunted:

“River Horse.”

No hippopotamus was visible, but hoof prints lead in all directions from the stream, betraying a much-frequented drinking spot for game.

Ogula was intently studying the ground.

“Beef lib this way,” he finally grunted. Disdaining the sticky depths, he plunged into the morass.

Huntingdon was about to follow, when Nkömbi Kakhi bent his broad back, and lightly carried Huntingdon across.

A savannah, wind-swept and barren, was reached.

The sun was high in the heavens. After the somber shadows of the bush its glare pained Huntingdon, and the heat was of bake-oven temperature. Yet the open was a relief after the dank, foul-smelling jungle.

Under the shade of immense cottonwoods at the edge of the plain, Ogula commanded a halt.

He gave express, minute instructions to Mbèga.

Then, followed by Ora and Nkombi Kakhi, he went forth to *reconnoître*.

Mbèga at once built a fire of twigs and prepared Huntingdon's breakfast.

Huntingdon was glad of the rest ; he was hungry and tired ; his feet pained him horribly and he was mud and slime almost to his waist and so wet was his coat from the excessive perspiration that he could have wrung it. But, as he ate his breakfast of hot coffee, boiled eggs and bread and butter, his clothing dried, then, stretching himself in the shade, he gave himself to his pipe and relaxation.

He was too drowsy for thought and was lazily gazing at Mbèga, when he saw the *bushboy* suddenly drop on all fours, and, with his great knife in his mouth, crawl cautiously towards the bush.

Huntingdon was instantly alert ; he sat up, grasped his rifle and waited.

He was conscious of a soft tread in the bush, then he saw the tall grass move in response to the creature stealing through it. E'er long a tiny gazelle advanced timidly to the open, and, startled by the on-crawling *bushboy*, stood still.

Huntingdon took his sights, but e'er his hand could obey the impulse of his brain to fire, a thrilling tragedy took place which held him fascinated. A huge python suddenly seized the gazelle in his teeth, crushed the life out of it, then enormously extending his jaws and emitting great quantities of saliva, slowly and tortuously he commenced to swallow the gentle creature, head first ! Its sides heaved convulsively and its delicate legs twitched violently. The spectacle was too much for the

white man, and his soft-nosed bullet flattened itself in the head of the snake, killing him instantly. The snake was fully twenty feet long and his coloring was distinctive and beautiful, but Huntingdon would not permit Mbèga to skin him. He wanted none of it; he resented the creature's attack upon the antelope, yet, had another antelope appeared, Huntingdon would have blazed away and killed it on sight — such is the consistency and mercy of man!

The noise of Huntingdon's shot brought back the others.

In a few words, but with eloquent gestures, Mbèga explained what had happened.

It brought forth no comment.

Ogula reported that a herd of buffalo had recently passed. He suggested proceeding softly, softly to the leeward.

The trail was taken up.

In silence the hunters crept along the shadowy bush, at the edge of the plain, then boldly advanced over sun-baked space.

Despite his recent food and rest, Huntingdon suffered from thirst and fatigue. For the first time in his life his gun was a burden and his clothing oppressed and hampered him. He was soft after the sea voyage. He ought to have had better sense than to set out so soon on a strenuous hunt!

In a sandy depression was a stagnant pool, from which Mbèga drank greedily. He caught Huntingdon's eye as he arose and from the *chop-box* he brought forth a bottle of Bordeaux wine! Huntingdon drank it eagerly.

Of course Mbèga had drink with him, but Huntingdon had not thought to demand it. However, it was not Mbèga Huntingdon had to thank for his well-supplied *chop-box*. It was Ogula, Ogula who had at first glance recognized in Huntingdon a superior even among white men; a man he was proud of and willing to serve; a man he was content to call master.

A big chief was Ogula among the Nkòmis. His name meant *tornado* and Ogula was worthy of that name. He was fearless and bold. When he once made up his mind to charge man or wild beast, he never hesitated. He rushed forth with incredible speed. He bore down his prey by virtue of his very audacity.

And over there, behind those squat bushes, Ogula sat, a little in advance of his white master — his ears attuned to the bush and its myriad sounds, his eyes in admiration and awe on the strange white man, who sat silent and indifferent, as though he had known the bush and its denizens all his life. Ogula thought on other white men he had served; men restless, nervous, without endurance, and at heart cowardly. He had nothing but contempt — all the great contempt of the savage — for any form of weakness. And now to his country had come a man worthy of respect and faithful service, a man who was indeed a Great White King!

Thus the wait began.

Huntingdon crouched in deep grass; bugs of all sorts crawled over him; wasps buzzed in his ears; mosquitoes tortured him and he was covered with sandflies, but he remained motionless.

He remembered that he and the quarry were stalking each other. The quarry's life depended upon his eye-

sight, his sense of smell, of hearing; and, most important of all, he was at home, and on the defensive! Huntingdon's life depended upon his senses, his ability to make himself a part of his surroundings, to sight and fire on the instant. His was the greater danger. He was an intruder, his senses less keenly developed than that of the beasts!

He noticed how Ogula's skin and dingy loin cloth toned in with the surroundings. He could not see the other savages but he knew they were there, inanimate as the very bush itself!

He determined to endure just as long as the savages did. To remain inert like them. He pondered on the astonishing density of, and activity in, the bush.

The seemingly dead spot simply teemed with incessant life.

Termites were voraciously feeding; ants were constructing wonderful houses of clay; *drivers* were making a bridge over a depression; wasps were busy on mud-houses; enormous spiders, the greatest he had ever seen and said to be the largest in the world, were weaving huge webs.

A green pigeon perched inert upon a bush; here and there an owl dozed; a sunbird with its peculiarly constituted tongue sipped honey from an *amaryllis*; gorgeous butterflies chased each other playfully; moths were laying eggs; bees were gathering honey; insect fed upon insect; big preyed upon little.

Birds known only in the museums of Europe were everywhere: large turacos; magnificent blue plantain-eaters; gray parrots with brilliant pink tail feathers; elegantly plumed peafowls; pink flamingoes; white peli-

cans; cranes; ibis; egrets; small, graceful honeysuckers; sun birds gorgeous as jewels; black swallows with a solitary spot like silver on the throat; seagulls, herons and marabouts.

Huntingdon's hand was stayed. He knew a time would come for bird shooting. Now the wait was for bigger game.

On the ground were spoor and droppings. Huntingdon studied the difference between new and stale traces.

The sun was overhead.

High noon had come.

The heat was oppressive. It arose from the sandy wastes in waves, blistering and blasting.

Huntingdon's position became irksome. He could no longer stand the assault of insects. He longed to get up and stretch. He essayed to rise, when, on his sensitive ear was borne the nervous tread of some animal on the watch.

Interest banished fatigue.

Again he was motionless. Every sense was alert.

The nervous tread passed to the rear and Ogula began to crawl cautiously forward. Huntingdon followed. Through an opening in the bush, he saw a sight that banished all fatigue and brought him the greatest delight of his whole life.

Rolling on the hot, scrub-grass-dotted plain was the unsuspecting game: a buffalo bull and two cows!

Huntingdon's excitement was so intense, that gone was all precaution. He was on his feet, his eyes along the barrel of his rifle.

Quick as he was, the game was quicker! Alarmed, it was on the run, heading for cover.

Huntingdon forged to the opening, so that impeding branches would not turn aside his shot.

Ogula was provoked because the white man had so recklessly disturbed the quarry, but his sullenness was no sooner born than it gave way to wonder, as Huntingdon's rifle spoke, once, twice, thrice!

A cow dropped in her tracks; another disappeared in the bush, wounded, leaving a trail of blood on the white sand. The bull, the first to scent danger, suddenly stopped in his mad flight and turned to face his pursuers!

Huntingdon, Ogula and Nkömbi Kakhi were advancing on a quick run. Ogula's gun had not yet spoken, but as the bull charged furiously forward, he aimed and fired! The shot grazed the bull's flank. With head down, and straight for Huntingdon, the maddened, infuriated creature charged!

With lowered gun, Ogula was rapidly stuffing shot home!

Nkömbi Kakhi braced himself, his spear held aloft!

Mbèga, scared, hugged the earth!

Ora stood still in his tracks. He carried Huntingdon's scatter-gun but he knew not how to use it. Suddenly he grasped its butt and stood on the defensive!

On came the bull, gaining momentum as he sped! His eyes were wild and the sun was full in them. Huntingdon recalled the vindictiveness of the animal, his almost human desire for vengeance.

Huntingdon was never so sure of eye, nor steady of nerve and hand. He knew his danger, and beneath it his judgment was cool, his wits clear!

He meant to plug the beast's eyes, one after the

other — a double shot in which he was proficient, but o'er his head something whizzed through space!

"Twas Nkömbi Kakhi's spear, hurled with unerring aim and almost superhuman force!

It caught the advancing beast in the nose and caused him to throw up his head in protest!

At one and the same time, the guns of Huntingdon and Ogula spoke!

The double shot was buried in the brute's throat!

So great had been his impetus, that he continued to plunge forward; then, suddenly, like a lead thing, he dropped.

Huntingdon rushed forward and was about to bend over the animal so eager was he to examine his first bush-cow, when something took him from behind, lifted him up and deposited him out of reach of the bull's legs!

"Twas Nkömbi Kakhi, stern disapproval on his face, and his voice was harsh as he muttered:

"White man damn fool look *niaré*¹ so. Him no be dead — look um!"

Huntingdon looked.

Fighting to rise, kicking viciously, and endeavoring to annihilate his enemies, the buffalo finally and reluctantly yielded the ghost.

Huntingdon turned to where the wounded cow had fallen. She was nowhere to be seen! A trail of blood led to the bush.

This time it was Ogula who stayed Huntingdon.

"Master, *niaré* from bush look white man. White man no fit fer look um. This one, he be plenty, plenty."

The excitement of the chase over, the game bagged,

¹ Buffalo.

Huntingdon was suddenly overwhelmed with lassitude ; he was glad to seek the shade, to stretch out at full length, to remain tranquil while his hunters took their first meal of the day ; then, they too rested, after which the bull was cut down the middle, loaded on bamboo poles and shouldered by the savages.

The homeward march was slow and tiresome, the least attractive of the day's hunt, and one which hunters would cheerfully and gladly dispense with. But all pleasures have their attendant miseries.

From the spot where the gazelle and python lay, a pair of vultures arose.

Huntingdon was too tired to shoot at them.

After the sandy, hot plain, the shadows and damp gloom of the bush were welcome.

Huntingdon was again bathed in perspiration. It oozed through his cartridge belt. The hat band of his helmet rubbed his head sore. His ankles twisted and turned in the underbrush. His feet were burned and blistered from his heavy shoes. He felt strangely disturbed, restless, nervous.

'Twas sundown when he reached the bungalow. He welcomed the sea breeze and uncovered his head.

Smithson, Sadler and Moore were on the veranda sipping *pernaud*.

Their excuses were many for not having kept their engagement.

Moore complained loudest of all. He thought Huntingdon had never meant to go ; that he was only bluffing !

As Huntingdon swallowed a great draught of absinthe, he sank heavily into a chair and stretched out his

legs. His shoes, new that morning, were skinned and torn.

"Jove! the bally things do hurt," was all he said, but Smithson dropped on one side of him and Sadler on the other. They removed his puttees and found his ankles so swollen that the shoe laces were imbedded in and lacerated the flesh. They cut the laces, but pull as hard as they could, the shoes would not budge!

Ogula stood by and tendered his knife.

"You butcher them, Ogula," said Smithson. "You be surer for hand than white man."

Ogula deftly cut the shoes from vamp to tip. Huntingdon's balbriggan socks were stained with blood and stuck to his heels.

Before the white men knew what he was about, with either hand, Ogula had jerked off a sock! Huntingdon's heels were rubbed raw to the bone!

Huntingdon winced once, that was all. He straightened himself and tried to push his feet under him, out of sight, but the white men understood.

Smithson gave quick command.

Ngumbè disappeared, to return with grease, powder, antiseptic cotton and ligatures.

Gently as a woman, Smithson dressed the heels and teased:

"So the tenderfoot would a-hunting go!"

"I went," answered Huntingdon, grimly.

"And the penalty's not one I'd care to pay," croaked Moore. "You're liable to have raw heels for an indefinite souvenir. Mebbe, they'll never heal — in this climate. You'll get *craw-craw* sure! Well, pleasant scratching."

"Ah, shut up, you Old-bone-yard," cried Sadler. "Other people's blood ain't as rotten as yours. You'll be all right, Mr. Huntingdon in a few days. Where's your socks and 'squeeter boots?"

But Huntingdon's feet refused to go into his boots, soft, pliant and large though the latter were.

Sadler stole off to the factory and returned with an enormous pair of list slippers.

"There's your size, Mr. Huntingdon," he cried. "Regular seven leaguers. Into them and don't let me hear another growl from you!"

Huntingdon smiled into the little skipper's ruddy, good-natured, youthful face.

Where was the selfishness the old coasters had croaked of? Not there among those Englishmen.

"Hurrah for the tenderfoot," yelled Sadler. "You got your buscow, old sport. Blood tells — even if it does trickle out of your heels."

"*Vivre la France, pomme-de-terre-frit,*" shouted Moore. "Who says the English can't shoot!"

"You don't call yourself a shot," derided Sadler, looking the great Moore over insolently. "You didn't show up this morning because you're such a rotten shot you didn't want to make an ass of yourself before a real hunter."

"G'wan, you don't know the muzzle from the butt," Moore retaliated.

A shrill blast from Smithson's whistle ended the palaver.

Ngumbè was ordered to get the buffalo ready for butchering.

There were much shouting and bustle in the rear.

Boys from all directions were gathering for their share of the beef.

On the plain, women were constructing racks on which to roast it and children were sent for firewood.

The night was soft and black. The watch's fire blazed on the beach, and from the little *Oka* a red light shone.

"Ready, Master," announced Ngumbè.

On the rear veranda a picturesque scene presented itself.

Huge lanterns hung from the low grass-mat roof directly over a crude table on which lay the bull, a hunting knife with an edge as keen as a lancet stuck in his thigh.

Grouped about with distended eyes and gleaming teeth were the *crewboys* and the hunters.

Their presence had another purpose besides securing a share of the beef. When a kill is made it is customary to send choice pieces of beef to all white men in the immediate neighborhood. The *boy* who delivers it is sure of a generous portion of tobacco as a reward.

The light fell full upon Smithson as he stood over the bull. He was in white; his great felt wide-awake was on the back of his head and his sleeves were rolled up. A refined, quick, bright figure he was, encircled by black, unclothed, wicked-looking savages, who watched his every move, striving for the most advantageous positions. Each wanted to be the first to catch the beef and be off with it, to receive the reward its delivery would bring. From the shadows, Huntingdon looked on, intensely interested. Sadler was with him, but Moore preferred the front veranda and *pernaud*.

Deftly and expertly Smithson cut up the bull.

The brains and a part of the *fillet* were hurled at Makàya, who was commanded to at once prepare a good supper.

Then followed pretty play and action.

As the pieces of beef were thrown over Smithson's head, they were eagerly caught, and nimble feet were off to obey Smithson's commands, which rang out one after another, clear and peremptory.

“Mr. Moore, one time!”

“The *Douane!*”

“The *Commandant!*”

“The *Chef de Poste!*”

“*Monsieur LeBlanc!*”

And so on through the list of white men at Cape Lopez.

Ogula had shouldered the remainder of the beef to be divided among the men, when Nkömbi Kakhi emerged from the gloom.

“Master Huntingdon, *foura mbani, mbani!*” and again he held up four fingers.

“You damned old skinflint,” roared Sadler. “Four francs! I guess not. Shilling be proper wages for one day's hunt. Don't give him any more, Huntingdon. Only sets a bad example and makes us pay more.”

“It's our bargain,” and Huntingdon handed over the money.

“You no dash us *tacco* and rum?” next asked Nkömbi Kakhi.

“It's the custom,” explained Smithson, “after a successful hunt, or other day's hard work, to set up the *tacco* and rum.”

"All right. Let Itula give the proper amount to Ogula to be divided up and charge it to me."

"Master Huntingdon be fine too much," said Nkombi Kakhi, disappearing in the night.

Besides Moore, there were two other guests for dinner: *Monsieur* Bouchard, who was to assume command of the *Ville de Maranhao* when she came up the coast, and *Monsieur* Pottier, who was to succeed Bouchard.

The dark, bushy beards of the Frenchmen formed a great contrast to the smooth faces of the Englishmen.

There was no elaborately written *menu* like Moore's; the table was laid in the old slovenly manner; and Mbèga employed the soiled towel, which he kept stowed between his bare legs when it was not needed. But Makaya sent in a delicious meal of

Cream of tomato soup.

Grilled fresh mullet with butter sauce.

Bushcow's brains with brown sauce.

Fillet of Bushcow with French fried potatoes.

French pickles. Roast Chicken.

Lettuce salad with French dressing.

Bread. Butter. Gruyère cheese.

Red and white wine. Champagne.

Café noir. Tea.

Monsieur Bouchard declared that the abduction of the *Loango* by Sadler was the richest tale Cape Lopez had enjoyed in many a moon. He mimicked the great rage of the *Commandant*; he spoke of the unheard-of generosity of the *Douane* in giving edibles to Huntingdon; and of Huntingdon's fame which was spreading farther throughout the bush, then he asked Huntingdon to tell him of the day's hunt.

Huntingdon was all enthusiasm. Graphically he set

forth the events of the day. He had never seen anything like the manner in which Nkömbi Kakhi hurled his spear and the ease with which the bull was carried home. Of his own sufferings he said nothing. However, Moore did, but *Monsieur Bouchard* cut in with:

"If *Monsieur Huntingdon* will hunt with the same enthusiasm this time next year as he did to-day, I shall be enchanted to set up the most *recherché* feast of which the *Ville de Maranhao* is capable."

"And if *Monsieur Huntingdon* should not hunt with the same pleasure one year hence, it will be his delight to set before *Monsieur Bouchard* and his friends the most elaborate feast possible in Cape Lopez," answered Huntingdon.

Which wager was duly pledged in champagne.

Pottier was small and wiry, with a muddy, pimply complexion. He had sloping shoulders and wore his trousers principally about his ankles. He had a lean and hungry look and appeared as though he couldn't get enough to eat. He was more interested in the viands than he was in the conversation, until the coffee was served, then both he and Bouchard were revelations.

Upon their celebrated actors and writers and painters they enthused, showing great knowledge of their lives and their works.

Moore was the only one out of it, for little Sadler showed a vast knowledge gained in poring over six-penny editions.

Literature from *Æschylus* to *Mark Twain* was discussed; painting, from *Leonardo da Vinci* to *Sargeant*; sculpture, from *Phidias* to *Rodin*; music, from the ancient Greek choruses to rag time and cake walks.

"Twas midnight when the enjoyable evening ended.

After the departure of the Frenchmen, Sadler bellowed over Mbèga, who had fallen asleep on the veranda:

"On, MacDuff, you fish-scented son of Ham; on with your snoring, and be thrice damned if you wake up before cock's speak."

CHAPTER X

EARLY the next morning the white men were awakened by the excited cry of Ngumbè:

“Master, Master, logs no live! Tide he take um!”

The dire news brought Smithson, Sadler and Huntingdon with a bound to the veranda. Not a log was left on the beach and there was evidence that the tide had been heavy and strong, and that Ndatuma, the watch, had slept at his post. The rum of the feast the night before had been too much for him, and, aware of the great loss of the logs and the punishment he merited and would surely get, he was hidden in the bush, and he had sense enough never again to apply to John Holt's for work.

Smithson's whistle shrieked shrilly, *crewboys* came running, and Sadler commanded:

“The gigs one time! All hands for'ard; we've got to chase up them logs and save as many as possible.”

High and dry on the beach were three surf boats, but there were hands enough only for two. The other traders were appealed to, but LeBlanc, the Frenchman, was the only man who sent men, and he loaned five stalwart *Ouroungoes*.

“Put on all your rags, Huntingdon,” little Sadler advised. “It's an all-day souse in the briny —”

“Yes, and take a peg, Huntingdon, a stiff one,” broke in Smithson, who was extremely nervous and was

helping himself to brandy and quinine, “ and some quinine, too ; it’s fever for all of us, but if I ever lay hands on that hound, Ndatuma, I’ll murder him in cold blood. Coffee’s all we have time for now, Ngumbè ; but get *chop* ready one time, plenty, plenty ; go to the *Commandant*, the *Douane* and Chief Ragundo and tell them Master Smithson must have *crewboys* ; double wages for everybody and big *dashes* of *tacco* and rum. Master *must* have *boys* ! ”

“ I savvy, Master.”

“ Makàya, Makàya,” shouted Smithson, and in his nervousness he reiterated his commands ; “ no time to wait now for breakfast ; see that plenty *chop*’s given to Ngumbè and Mbèga, and get it ready one time so’s you can send it as soon as enough *boys* are found to man the third canoe, then send it down coast as fast as oars can pull them, savvy ? ”

“ Me, I *compreends*,” quietly answered the *Loango*, turning again to the galley, where he was heard to command the Jack-wash to get “ *poulets* and *viands* ready *toute de suite*. ”

It was shortly after six o’clock when the two canoes shoved off, and again Smithson called forth his commands to the servants left behind. Again and again they were cautioned to have plenty of *chop* and drink and to get the canoe manned and sent off one time.

The early morning breeze was refreshing, the sea was choppy, and the tide was favorable. Almost simultaneously the crews set up a plaintive boat song and pulled steadily for several hours. The white men relaxed and rested, but, gradually, the breeze died ; the might of the sun grew momentarily greater ; and the sea

became smooth and gleamed like polished jet. The reflection from it was so great that Huntingdon's eyes seemed to bore through his head and his feet were tortured almost beyond endurance. Raw and sore though they were from yesterday's hunt, he had forced them into tan, waterproof boots, which he then knew were not the proper sort, and he envied Smithson and Sadler their mosquito boots and their indifference to the present. They both slept outstretched in the bottom of the canoe, their helmets well down over their eyes and their heads in the slight shade afforded by the thwarts. Huntingdon was seated in the stern with Ora, who held the tiller. He wore no spine pad and it was as though a steady stream of intense heat were playing on his back.

The song of the men ceased; their stroke was mechanical and not so strong, yet the tide continued with them and fairly good speed was made.

Suddenly Ora cried:

“Timber live!”

Beyond the vision of the white men were the first beached logs.

Immediately, Smithson and Sadler sat up, alert, and, hammering on the gunwale with his *cashing-go*, Sadler commanded:

“*Negesa, negesa!*”¹

The *crewboys* responded and the canoes shot forward.

Abreast of the logs, both white and black men plunged into the water. The tide was out and there was no surf. The white men discarded their coats, and, clad only in singlets and trousers with helmets pushed

¹ Make haste, make haste.

well down over their eyes, each of them personally superintended the salvage of a log. The work was heavy, the heat continued to stoke up and there wasn't a breath of air.

The salt water and his heavy boots caused such acute agony to Huntingdon's raw heels, that he had a *crewboy* pull off his boots, and for the rest of the day, Huntingdon, the erstwhile dandy of Mayfair and Belgravia, went about unshod like a savage.

"I say, Smithson," he finally cried, "why can't Ora, the headman, superintend the job and save us this exposure?"

"Because headmen haven't any more brains than other natives and the latter have none at all. If you want anything accomplished in this bally country, you've got to oversee it yourself. You don't think I'm doing this for the fun of it, do you? Left to themselves, these beggars would have returned with a log one, one, swearing by all the gods they haven't got that no other timber was visible within fifty miles. These beasts are liars of the first calibre, and Legree's the only sort of a white man who gets work out of negroes."

Despite his misery, Huntingdon could not help smiling at little Sadler. His cheeks were distended by great wads of chewing tobacco and he cried continuously:

"On, on, you hairless Mexican pups, work and it's *tacco* and rum 'till your bellies split and your eyes drop from your lousy skulls! On, on, you chocolate-hued MacDuffs, and the first nigger who shirks I'll murder!"

Huntingdon, too, fell to cursing and belaboring the natives.

"That's right; go it, tenderfoot," cried little Sadler, delighted. "A nigger hates a white man's oath worse than he does his fists, so give 'em hell and more hell."

Thus, 'twixt belaboring and cursing and the promising of rewards, the *crewboys* were urged to greater efforts.

The white men pulled continuously at brandy, and, every now and then, Smithson sought the canoe where he kept his quinine bottle and took large doses of the drug. Huntingdon, too, took a big dose, but Sadler continued in his refusal to take any.

High noon and resting time came, but no *chop* and Ngumbè appeared. From sun and exposure the white men were dizzy and faint. Smithson's eyes were sunken in his head, they glowed unnaturally, his cheeks were flushed with fever, but not one drop of sweat appeared. On the other hand, Sadler and Huntingdon perspired profusely.

Like the white men the negroes had taken no breakfast and the machinery of their bodies was rapidly running down. Their food also depended upon Ngumbè. Every man longed for a drink of water too, but exploration had failed to find water and nobody had thought to bring any along. Thirsty, hungry and pretty well spent, work was an effort. Still the white men persisted and urged the negroes on. Smithson knew that rest and shade ought to be sought, but he likewise was aware of the value of the present moments. The remaining logs were higher up on the beach and the sand in which they were embedded had dried, making their removal a stupendous task. Besides, the tide had turned and although it would eventually float the beached logs, night

would have then fallen and danger from man-eating sharks was too great to permit of further work.

At last there came a shout over the water and Ngumbè arrived with Mbèga, *chop* and fourteen extra *crewboys*. It was two o'clock.

Rice for the men was immediately portioned out; they separated into *jams*,¹ a cook to each *jam*. The cooks sought wood, made fires and boiled the rice, while the other *crewboys* rested in the shade.

In the *fetish* house of a small, abandoned village just off the beach were huddled the white men. The house was merely a roof of dried grass on slanting uprights which threatened to fall any second, but it afforded the greatest thing the white man needed, and that was shade.

Dirty and wet and clad only in loin cloths, Mbèga and Ngumbè placed the food on a water-soaked packing case. In silence and ravenously the white men pulled at tough chicken, ate cold potatoes thick with palm-oil, and swallowed great quantities of hot coffee and Bordeaux wine. No thought was given to knives or forks, nor to table etiquette. Hunger tortured; all else was forgotten.

Smithson was the only one who spoke and what he said was pitiful and expressed volumes:

“I feel like a convict, homeless, friendless, and sentenced to penal servitude for life.”

One by one the white men were satiated; one by one they rolled over on the ground and slept.

Black men, too, slept, and the lapping of the waters on the rafted logs was the only sound that broke the silence of the equatorial tropics.

¹ Squad, gang.

Ordinarily, two hours' rest are daily taken after the midday meal, but time was precious, and in one short hour, Ora's whistle sent both white and black men again into the water.

The tide was rapidly coming in, but it was not yet strong enough to float the embedded logs. Crowbars and cables were necessary to dislodge them. All hands were pulling on the cable wound about an enormous log, when the rope broke and the negroes were sent sprawling in all directions. They rolled on the sand, laughing boisterously, but severe lashes from the *cashing-gos* of the white men caused them to scramble to their feet and stand in line for further effort.

Sadler took the crowbar from Ora; he put half the force to shoving the log and the other half to pulling on a new cable.

There was silence as the negroes pushed, pulled and strained. The hollows in their powerful, nude backs grew deeper as muscles and ribs arose in great welts on either side thereof. Sweat ran from their bodies as though pails of water had been thrown over them.

"Move it, *boys*," cried Huntingdon, in appreciation of their efforts and in admiration of their wondrous strength, "and it's rum and *tacco* a whole week for each."

Every native heard and registered the promise, but not one of them glanced towards the white man, so great was the strain of pushing and pulling. But the log never budged.

"Stop a moment!" commanded Smithson, seeking a crowbar and giving another to Huntingdon, "Rest and breathe deep for a few moments — now — come on,

Sadler and Huntingdon, crowbars under with mine! Boys, steady on the cable — pull!"

Silence! Men pushed and pulled with all their might! Slowly and reluctantly the log responded to the concentrated effort and slightly quivered. A new hold on the crowbars, harder pushing, more strenuous pulling, the log moved, she was out of her bed and off down the sand! Part of the force was left to roll her into the water and raft her, and the rest were already at work on another log.

Thus the strenuous labor went on.

The tide was high and strong; the rafted logs bumped each other lively; the sun was losing his heat, the water was up to the armpits of the white men and they were chilled through and through and were thoroughly exhausted.

They cried for wine. There wasn't any! Coffee, then. There wasn't any of it, either! *Chop*, then. Not a morsel of food was left! The ravenously hungry white men had eaten it all at one sitting.

The oaths poured on the head of Ngumbè were enough to grill the wretch, and there would have been a dead negro had Smithson or Sadler got within arm's length of him. But he fled to the water, only to come back howling with fear; a blue shark dashed by, and between the devil and the shark, the negro chose the devil. But he had nothing to fear now from the white men; the shark not only took their attention, but it was six o'clock, sundown and flood tide!

Work had to be abandoned.

Out of two hundred logs escaped, only sixty-six were rescued!

The homeward pull was slow and torturesome. The canoes, towing the logs, had tide and wind against them. They showed no lights, for Ngumbè never once thought to bring lanterns. But the white men were too far spent for further vituperation. They were drenched with spray, cold from the night's breeze and thoroughly miserable. They crouched in the bottom of the canoe. They were too far gone even to rest or sleep. For the first time in many moons the *crewboys* worked without a curse, threat or blow from their white masters.

'Twas midnight when the canoes put into Holt's beach. The white men dragged themselves to the bungalow; they spoke no word; they stopped not for food and drink; in their damp clothing, they dropped like logs into their beds!

It had indeed been a day of African pleasantry.

The next morning three silent, pale white men met at breakfast; eating was a pretense; dull lassitude and fever reigned!

Inert, but with eyes wide open and brilliant, Smithson lay on a steamer chair on the veranda gazing out over the bay; Sadler sought the little *Oka* and slept on her deck; Huntingdon dressed his sore heels and longed for ice for his throbbing head and aching throat! For the first time he recognized what luxuries in Africa are the most commonplace things of civilization! There was naught to do but to endure, and, like a true soldier, he endured in silence!

CHAPTER XI

SUNUP Saturday the *Ville de Maranhao* loomed large on the southern horizon line.

Her passengers looked like corpses returning to Europe for burial! They were outstretched on deck chairs, too miserable to do aught but glance at the few visitors from Cape Lopez!

The ship's surgeon, the stewardess and several of the crew were down with dysentery!

Matadi, Leópoldville and Brazzaville were reported infernally hot, dry and dirty! Rain had not fallen for over a year!

Smallpox and sleeping sickness were epidemic. Thousands of natives were dying. White men too were passing away. One blew out his brains in the delirium of black water fever. Another because he could not stand the agony of the removal of a guinea worm.

Not one pleasant rumor was reported!

The white men of Cape Lopez shrugged their shoulders — and helped Bouchard celebrate his promotion to the captaincy of the *Ville de Maranhao* and to take leave of Cape Lopez.

Huntingdon saw a proper *burst*. It commenced Saturday night with dinner and ended Sunday midnight with the sailing away of the French steamer.

While white men made merry within, natives went at a savage pace on the plains.

Bouchard was generous with rum and tobacco. The natives yelled and shouted as loud as they could; they pounded on all sorts of tin and enamel cooking utensils, and, amidst general pandemonium and drunkenness, the disgusting contortions called dancing began.

The scene was brilliant with blazing fires.

Two lines of dancers were formed, the men on one side, the women on the other.

At either end were drummers, beating furiously with bare palms upon enormous *tam-tams*.

Singing, yelling, crying, and generally letting off steam, up and down between the lines, men and women danced, never together and one after the other.

About the loins of the women were bands of cloth pulled so tight that the abdomen was sharply defined and its contortions emphasized.

The dance was anything but graceful: feet never left the ground, but were scraped back and forth, and the abdomen was exercised violently.

Men, women and children had exactly the same swing, the same rhythm, the same shuffling of feet, the same wriggling of the body.

Wilder and wilder beat the drummers! They were now astride the *tam-tams*. Faster and faster gyrated the natives! Losing control of themselves, they reeled, and fell exhausted. One by one they arose and went at it more recklessly!

When pleasures paled within, white men joined the orgy without. Greater was the uproar. More suggestive the dancing, encouraged by the plaudits and suggestions of the white men.

The abandon was savage, wild!

Rum and *mimbo*¹ seemed endless. It was gulped down continuously. Huge goblets of it were drained at a draught. Throats seemed aluminim, so little effect had the fiery liquids upon them. At length outraged nature rebelled and daylight found white and black exhausted. Close together they lay in drunken stupor.

With splitting heads, and nerves all wrong, the white men awoke one by one, and, kicking women out of their way, they sought the shade of their respective bungalows, where they lay about unshorn, scantily clothed and thoroughly wretched. They called for drink, and more drink.

Stupefied, they slept till nightfall.

Again they gathered at Bouchard's, but little pretense was made of taking food, and champagne was drunk exclusively. Every man insisted upon opening wine to bid the good Bouchard *bon voyage*.

Bouchard was doing his best to sober up to take command of his ship. At first, he objected to his guests ordering wine from their own factories, but men's tempers were such that to give in to their wishes was the only way to avoid a general riot.

On the plains the natives were again going their savage pace. The din and racket were again enough to split the aching heads of white men, but the latter were too far in liquor to comprehend anything save to keep going. Moore sang a suggestive song which was boisterously applauded and followed by others.

It was midnight. Bouchard's departure was at hand.

Bon voyage, bonne santé, and bonne chance were spoken and drunk to repeatedly, then, with linked arms

¹ Native whisky.

and singing *La Machitte*, the march to the water began. But the heavy sandy beach was zigzaggy, uncertain; the water seemed far, very far away and the route to it a high mountain with no top; all effort was needed for walking and the song ceased. Then Bouchard boasted of what *he* was going to do as commander of the *Ville de Maranhao*.

The deposed captain took offense and demanded to know why *he* should be so insulted by one he considered his *plus cher ami*.

A duel hovered in the air, when the *Douane* broke forth:

“We are *sauvage, sauvage*, worse than the blacks to end up a delightful revelry like snarling beasts!”

Men fell on each other’s necks. Nobody remembered to have done any snarling, everybody was the best of friends and it was an irreparable loss because the good Bouchard, a *camarade* and friend and jolly good-fellow, must take command of a ship and set out for civilization! How *triste*, how *misérable* everybody would be without him!

Everybody sniffed, then everybody cried. It were as though mourners were taking leave of a corpse.

Finally the surf boat was reached and men tumbled into it. Some tumbled into the water too, and were fished out by the ship’s crew, who were sober, despite the fact that they had sat in attendance upon their new commander from eight until midnight!

The boat had put out, when a great shout came over the sand.

Wildman, the Swiss, had been left behind. Up and down the beach he ran, shouting for the boat to return.

Then, as she continued her way, he offered his whole fortune, the trade goods in his shop, everything he possessed for a *pirogue*¹ to take him off to the French steamer.

But not a native canoe was visible, nor was a sober paddler to be found.

Poor little Pottièr! The *burst* was his *cachet*. He never woke up. They found him under the fierce morning sun — dead!

At sundown, without prayer or psalm, they shoveled him into the sand in the little graveyard on the beach. His coffin was an empty gun case. O'erhead great, gaunt *cocatiers* sighed mournfully and upon the sands the waters of the Bay of Mandji sobbed an eternal *requiem* over the tenderfoot who was blasted e'er he had a chance to look about. Hell's Playground claimed him early!

White men were saddened, but not for long. Men do not dwell much in their thoughts — out there. More absinthe and brandy were stowed within — to keep thoughts down.

Moore came up to Holt's in an ugly mood.

He accused Huntingdon of being too stuck up to take part in their good times. He swore that he saw Huntingdon sneak off when a black woman tried to catch him about the neck. Huntingdon had insulted Bouchard, the *Douane*, the *Commandant*, the whole French government.

“ If you're too damn fine to do as the rest of us white

¹ Canoe.

gentlemen do, why we'll let you alone," he raged. "We ain't hankering after society that ain't hankering after us. You'll be glad to have us take you back, after you've tasted a bit of Africa's cursed monotony."

"Speak for yourself," defended Sadler, the rage of a bull in his voice and resentment in his attitude. "Since when have you become such good friends with the *Pomme-de-terre-frits*. You're always blubbering about your hatred of them, and, if you had *your* way, you'd blow every one of 'em to hell. Suppose you go and do it."

"When I come back again, you'll know it — you and your — of a Great White King!"

CHAPTER XII

SMITHSON's departure for N'djolé was fixed for the following Saturday night. He was to leave on the *Avant-Garde*.

A whole week was given to conscientious work.

Sadler and Smithson explained things to Huntingdon with patience and exactness.

Itula was to remain. He was an excellent *shopboy*, but a thief. Huntingdon was to keep an eye on him, but in secret. Open suspicion would cause him to make a great haul; he would run off and Huntingdon's loss would be great.

Mbèga declared to Smithson that Huntingdon was a *proper master*. That meant the *bushboy* would stand by Huntingdon as much as a native is capable of fidelity towards a white man. Smithson encouraged *Mbèga* and advised him that Huntingdon would reward him greatly for faithful service. To Huntingdon Smithson said:

“ *Mbèga*’s crude, but you’d better keep him. A black friend counts out here, when white men forget the meaning of the word. *Nkömbi Kakhi*, and *Ogula*, the shootman, will stand by you also. You’ve got them for keeps. You’ve lost no time getting vassals. Hang on to them. And further safeguard yourself by taking a wife. There’s something in the air, in the sun’s heat, in the general precipitation of nature that engenders unholy desires in the holiest of men. Don’t try to fight them

— you'll only lose out. Again, the natives can't imagine any man's living to himself. They'll think you're queer — bewitched, and they won't come near you. Then your cake'll be dough and you might as well go back to civilization for your plans'll come to naught here."

" Is it as bad as that, old man? "

" Indeed, it is. Take a daughter of Chief Ragundo. It'll secure you his friendship and influence. He wields great power among various tribes and he's the most powerful chief in this section of the country; also, he's on good terms with the French. He settles many disputes too knotty for civilized jurisprudence."

Huntingdon was further advised to keep up the pretense of being a Great White King. It was his biggest asset. He could continue to dispense the largess of a king with gifts insignificant to him, but superb to savage simplicity.

He was told some of the tales about him spread throughout the bush by Nkömbi Kakhi, and Ogula, the shootman.

He had killed a vulture a mile in the air!

He stopped a wounded, on-rushing, mad bull simply by the power of his blue eyes; the bull fell prostrate and, although he kicked the white man again and again, he could neither bruise nor harm him!

He had shot a python in the neck and caused the bullet to curve in such a manner as not to wound a tiny gazelle the serpent was in the act of swallowing! The gazelle was restored whole and followed the white man home!

Huntingdon laughed heartily at the garbled versions of facts.

"Don't laugh, old man, at the superstitions of the savages nor at their tales," advised Smithson. "Respect native customs, and you'll not be sorry. The savages are fond of display and long on caste. Call a free native a *nigger* and it's worth your life. That term of opprobrium is applied only to slaves."

"I thought the French had freed all the slaves."

"By no means; slavery's still the open sore of Africa and it won't be healed in our time nor in the time of our great grandchildren, if ever. The natives still buy and sell slaves among themselves, and all captives in tribal wars are made slaves; however, if any slave goes to a white man and demands his freedom, he's free in the French legal sense, but the natives still consider him a slave, and in his own soul the man still feels himself a slave."

"It's difficult then to introduce new forms, customs and laws among the natives?"

"Very, and that's why civilization has made such little headway here. Traders were admitted where missionaries and government men were either driven out or eaten, hence Moore was right the other day when he told you that trade has done more to civilize this country than France has ever done, and that trade was British trade. As to native customs, the natives believe implicitly in their sorcerers or witch doctors and no amount of civilization or religion can change them."

"Is there any native religion at all?"

"Yes, that of superstitious fear. The natives have no God as we have, nor do they live rightly because of any punishment that might come to them from His anger, but they do pay *dashes*, as they call their

offerings of palm-nuts and other food, to a bad spirit so that he will not bewitch them. In other words, they take no note of good, but they do bribe something which they know to be evil to keep away from them and not harm them. *Ju-ju's* a religion difficult to explain and to understand; you've got to live with these people and imbibe things gradually. You can be on the safe side by never deriding their beliefs no matter how ridiculous they may seem to you; respect kings and chiefs; do not laugh at their tatterdemalion display; keep on as you have begun, for you've unconsciously begun right. The natives, children as they are in many ways, must have some superior being to *kotow* to, and they've taken to you naturally. Your battle with them is won; you'll get all the trade you can handle and, if you'll take my advice, you'll stick strictly to business for the three years you have allowed yourself, then you'll go back home, marry your sweetheart and for God's sake stay there."

"Thanks, old man," Huntingdon began, but Smithson cut in:

"Now I'm going to tell you how to make money quick; that's all you're here for, isn't it?"

"That's all, old chap," and Huntingdon, interested, listened attentively.

"This trade-palaver on between the French and the natives can be worked to your profit."

"Indeed? I thought all along it would operate against me."

"*Au contraire.* Listen. Wherever the *Berlin Act* has not designated a district open to trade, competitive trade has been driven out, as you have already been told."

"Yes."

“ Well, in those districts, as you have also been told — and I want you to mark this well and remember it, for it’s the key to your success — the French monopolists have done away with standard goods of a standard market value and substituted inferior goods at inferior prices. A native is slow, very slow to accept something new in lieu of something old to which he has become accustomed, especially if the substitute is inferior in value and higher in price. Now it’s a fact that the thin, narrow French prints in no way compare with the heavy, wide prints of the British and the Germans in universal use when open trade existed. Then take tobacco — the greatest legal tender here, for every native from a young child, male and female, to ancient men and women, smoke continuously,— the natives were accustomed ever since the white trade first came among them to the broad, Virginia leaf at a standard fixed price, the *kilo*. Show a *bushman*, who has never seen a white man, a head of Virginia leaf tobacco, and he immediately recognizes its trade value, as you recognize that of a *bob* or a *quid*. Now in lieu of that tobacco, the French have substituted an inferior, unknown brand at a higher price. The natives won’t have it, for two reasons: *primo*, because it doesn’t smoke as well; *secundo*, its cost is greater, while native products offered in exchange are lessened in value and very often condemned and appropriated by the French.”

“ Bad business.”

“ The worst in the world, because the natives refuse to trade with the French, and *concessionaires* who did a profitable business in open trade days, are now bankrupt. The *concessionaires* blame the government for

having unloaded worn-out territory, and the government blames the *concessionaires* for their lack of business policy in doing away with standard goods of a standard trade value. The natives demand redress from the government, but what can it do? It has let out *concessionaire* rights for an annual stipend; everything therein, thereon, or thereunder every *hectar* named in the trade-grant belongs to the *concessionaire*; let the native cut a log of ebony, secure a point of ivory, or kill a fish-eagle, it belongs to the *concessionaire*, granted to it by the government without the consent of, or payment to, the native owner."

"I thought one of the first laws of civilization is the right to enjoy in peace one's own possessions?"

"So it is, but the natives, who have been in possession of these lands from time out of mind and who still continue in possession of them can't even call a plantain their own, if the *concessionaire* demands it and confiscates it. It's a positive truth that free natives are cast into prison for theft for gathering the products of their own lands!"

"Extraordinary!"

"Robbery, oppression and slavery! It's natural for a nation to fight for commercial supremacy, but where that fight narrows into a crushing, paralyzing trade monopoly, it becomes robber economy, fatal in the end to the robber."

"True."

"Throughout the entire colony commerce is dead—due, it is said, to the depreciation in the price of rubber. Why, the French haven't even the courage of their own sins and now that they've reaped the reward of their

crimes, they continue to place the blame everywhere else than where it belongs. Instead of propitiating the natives, flattering them by giving them the choice of a wide range of trade goods as one would surfeit a child with playthings, the French *concessionaires* first restricted the choice of playthings, then permitted no choice at all and attempted to force on the natives something they don't want. That's not business, especially here, in this hell hole, where it is the native alone who counts. He existed ages before he knew there was such a creature as a white man and he can go on existing without him, but without the coöperation and friendship of the native, the white man might just as well pack up and get out."

"Can't the white man ever become acclimated enough to work the country?"

"Never. He can oversee, yes, but the labor must be done by the natives. They alone can withstand the fierce sun and battle with the diseases endemic and epidemic to their lands. White men have been out here, some of them for upwards of thirty years, but what are they? Physical wrecks, from their affairs with native women —"

"Why don't white traders bring their wives out?"

"Climate. No white woman save a missionary ever permits her children to be born here or remains for any length of time. Huntingdon, you can't understand how really wretched this climate is until you've lived through a succession of seasons; then it's not so bad here on the coast as it is in the interior. In the dry season Cape Lopez is the health resort of this part of Africa."

“ Won’t civilization ever come here as it has in East and South Africa? ”

“ Never, else it would have been here long ago. You can’t overcome natural deleterious conditions; you can’t stop eight months’ rain, nor water four months’ drouth; it’s impossible to purify jungles, to kill their poisonous insects and vapors, impossible! ”

“ But the wealth’s here? ”

“ Plenty of it and therefore the French are silly asses to stop up the avenues from whence it must flow to them, and that’s through the natives. I’ve been all through the bush, I know the feelings of the natives. They call it thief-palaver, and it is thief-palaver. Nothing for nothing is the dictum of all righteousness. How dare any one people defy all right? The French give worse than nothing for something; they’ve robbed the native and they continue to rob him. He is left nothing, yet out of nothing he must pay a yearly tax to the government. I told you all this the other day, but I repeat it, for it has a direct bearing on your success. To get something from nothing is an utter impossibility. Something’s got to give way. It does. The natives are crushed to the earth and they never rise again. France in her greed has killed the goose that laid the golden egg. Now, France might find other geese, but who can resuscitate dead geese? ”

“ Bad policy, very bad policy! ” ejaculated Huntingdon.

“ How would a civilized man act were an unbidden stranger to enter his home, take possession of it, and demand the wherewith to keep him there? ”

“ The owner would be justified in ousting the intru-

der and he would be upheld by every court in the world."

"Just so. Yet a whole army intrudes itself upon the French Congo and compels the native to support it that it might continue to oppress him. Native troops go into a town and take food from the very mouths of babies. You've no conception of the cruel tyranny one black man in the name of the law exerts over another! You've got to see it to appreciate it. Claim jumping is resented in every part of the civilized world, and I don't see why an exception should be made in an uncivilized country especially where the natives continue to sit on the claim. If possession is nine-tenths of the law, shall only one-tenth prevail? Shall there be one law for the White and another for the Black? Now, you and I, Huntingdon, belong to the greatest colonizing country in the world; the building up of our colonies has been by no means free from stain, yet, I claim, that equity should know no color nor creed, and I also know that equity is not the rock upon which colonies are built. It is grab and continue to grab as long as there is anything to grab, then, when nothing more can be wrung out of the grab, it is thrown aside, and the ears of colonizers are deadened to the wail of those passed up by the clinking of gold to be had in other grabs not yet preëmpted by the white man."

"Have the natives no redress from the wrong perpetrated on them by the *concessionaires*?"

"As I started out to say, Huntingdon, the natives have demanded an adjustment of their wrongs, but what can the government do? They've taken and continue to take an annual stipend from the *concessionaires* for the exclusive exploitation of certain territories;

if the natives are permitted ownership of that which is legally their own, the French government is liable to breach of contract with the traders, hence monetary damages."

"But wherein lies the greatest wrong?" demanded Huntingdon. "Isn't it where the majority are oppressed to the gain of a few?"

"Certainly it is, but the French government temporizes and temporizes; and in the meanwhile, native towns have fallen into decay, young men and young women have run away from them to open trade districts where work is to be had; old men and old women, once a power unto themselves, and leaders of powerful tribes, sit disconsolate and wretched, contrasting the prosperity and happiness of open trade days with the restricted trade conditions of to-day. No comparison so keen as that of a savage where only two things are to be compared. They contrast the poverty of to-day with the prosperity of open-trade days. From the government the natives hide, because they fear imprisonment for nonpayment of taxes which they cannot possibly raise; they refuse to work their lands and have their products condemned and themselves arrested for theft; *concessionaires* can't get laborers and all is chaos. Now here's where you come in. Find out what concessions are about to go under; have your solicitor go to their home offices in France or in Belgium, buy them out, operate them ostensibly by French companies, and put in a few men that you know to be trustworthy. Once in possession, the hint can be dropped to the natives that you're the real owner, and you'll have applications for work

and more products willingly brought to you than you can conceive of, or could get in any other way."

"Thanks, old man, it's awfully kind of you," said Huntingdon, gratefully. "I'll act on your hint."

"I presume you can command all the capital you need?"

"Yes. If I make good the governor will see to that. We're to have a corporation of which I'm to be the head."

"Good! Get busy about those concessions as soon as you can. There's no time like the present, things move slowly out here, Europe's far away for correspondence, and life's so uncertain."

CHAPTER XIII

As Huntingdon and Smithson chatted confidentially, whistling carelessly, Sadler swaggered aft to the galley.

In the doorway sat Makàya digging a jigger from his foot with a paring knife.

“Then you mek *chop* for them knife without wash-ing him?”

“I fit for wish um, *Mon Dieu* I fit —”

“You’re a liar! But if I ketch you at it —” and Sadler’s fists came together. “Say, Makàya, you savvy them fine, fine drinking cups of King Huntingdon? ”

“I savvy.”

“Fetch one.”

Makàya brought forth a cup of rhinoceros horn.

“Now fetch *ningo*.”¹

Their voices vibrated through sleepy space. Curious, Mbèga, Ogula and Ngumbè came from their rest-ing places, and gathered about Sadler and the *Loango*.

“Put them *ningo* for cup, Makàya!”

The *Loango* obeyed.

“Look them cup for outside, you wild-eyed bushpigs. Him ketch all same water no live? ”

Four pairs of distended eyes minutely examined the outside of the cup, wondering what the palaver was about.

¹ Water.

"Throw them water out. Look outside them cup again. He ketch all same, eh?"

Again a lengthy and minute examination in tense silence. Then, growing superstitious, the natives backed away.

"Them cup all same water live, water no live?" demanded the little skipper.

No one answered. The restless eyes of the savages betrayed their desire to run away.

"Answer!" and Sadler kicked Ngumbè, viciously.

"Them cup all same water live, no live," admitted Ngumbè, weakly.

"Here you, Makaya, now put the rest of them water in them cup!"

The *Loango* reluctantly obeyed. His hand was nervous; fear was alive within him, and in the others too.

"Put them cup for ground!" Sadler commanded.

The *Loango* was glad to be rid of it. He backed away, followed by the others.

"Here, you black-skinned vermin, get 'round close, in a eircle!" and Sadler punched the savages, one after the other, forcing them to form a circle about him.

Slowly he gazed at each, and, when abject fear of what was to follow held the savages motionless, suddenly, Sadler pulled from his pocket a twig bearing green leaves, and dangled it in their faces!

They drew sharply away — affrighted!

Farther and farther apart they edged, then Mbèga started to run; the others essayed to follow, but Sadler bellowed:

"Stay here, you brutes, or I'll make every damn nigger drink the bally stuff." The threat caused the

savages to reluctantly gather again about their tormentor, and he yelled: "Makàya, you wretch, name them thing!"

"*Mboundu, mboundu*," whispered the *Loango*, in a voice hollow with fear, his thin form vibrating nervously.

"What he be for?" demanded Sadler, relentlessly.

"Him be poison, proper poison," came from the terrified *Loango*.

"Oh, ho!" rollicked Sadler. "You know your devilish medceen then — the truck you feed to suspected criminals. Guilty they live for ground,¹ not guilty they don't live for ground. I speak true for mouth?" and again Sadler shoved the twig in the faces of the savages.

"True!" muttered Ogula, the giant, childish with fear, while Mbèga clung to the earth in abject terror; and Ngumbè held his breath. For *mboundu*, the great trial poison, is universally dreaded!

Dramatically Sadler dropped on his haunches, and bent over the cup.

"Gimme a knife," he yelled.

Not a savage moved. Mbèga still kept his face close to the earth.

"Mbèga, you bush pig, gimme your knife?"

"Never got um, Master, never got um," the wretch whined.

"Get up, then, or I'll make you chew off this jolly *mboundu* with your teeth."

Mbèga quickly arose, and Ogula took a great hunting knife from his cloth and eagerly extended it.

"You're waking up, are you?" And Sadler spat

¹ Die.

in the giant's face. "Ah, it's a good thing there's some devil that makes your cowardly hearts submit to your masters. Now, come closer!"

The savages were again reluctant to obey, and, slashing the air viciously with the knife, Sadler threatened:

"Don't be all day or I'll carve you into bits, one after the other."

Again the savages slowly closed around Sadler.

Although inwardly laughing, the little skipper's lips were set in a straight line and his blue eyes were hard as steel.

Dramatically he scraped the bark of the strychnine into the cup, the eyes of the savages watching his every move; over and about the cup he danced a sailor's hornpipe, emitting piercing gallery-god whistles which shrieked through space to the dense bush beyond from whence they were thrown back in mocking echoes; then, suddenly, he took up the cup in one hand and with the other he briskly stirred the mixture, holding it close to the faces of the savages and crying in terror-sustaining tones:

"Look them cup for outside, look um, you fiends from hell, look um!"

The eyes of the savages almost started from their heads as the *cup slowly discolored!*

There was no restraining the savages now; they were off on the wings of superstitious fear, and little Sadler yelled:

"Hit the breeze lively, you fiends from hell, and never forget that witch doctor for King Huntingdon tell him when black man make medceen for him belly!"

Moore didn't come near all week, although Smithson's departure for N'djolé was known all over Cape Lopez.

On Saturday night Huntingdon and Sadler went aboard the *Avant-Garde* to see their comrade off.

Moore was drinking with her captain, LeBlanc, the Frenchman, and Wildman, the Swiss.

He took no notice of his compatriots. Nor they of him. They might have been utter strangers to each other.

The night was divine.

The moon was big, round and low, shedding a silvery radiance over all things, and tingeing them with romance.

A gentle, cooling breeze tempered the heat.

Africa throbbed with entrancing witchery.

In silence the white men walked the little deck.

Suddenly, Smithson stopped and sighed:

“ Ah, why can't Africa always be like this, livable and beautiful? ”

There was such a world of tragedy in his voice, that, for the first time in his life, the irrepressible Sadler found no voice for raillery and mockery. Huntingdon, too, was silent. The night breeze alone answered Smithson and what it said cannot be interpreted by men.

Smithson gazed steadily out over the bay, which, under the moon, was an expanse of shimmering silver, but from the land, distinct and clear, came the mournful swish of the gaunt *cocotiers*.

“ Dead men's bones, that's what they rattle like — fitting sentinels for that hole in the ground — on those forsaken sands — and the moan of the sea — God, will only eternal sleep shut them out — will — ”

Huntingdon and Sadler stole away.

"He's got the jim-jams bad," whispered little Sadler.
"His complexion's the color of the Ogôwe."

"I guess he's in for it, poor old chap," commiserated Huntingdon.

"I say, Huntingdon, you've got — what is it the Frenchies say you've got — *aplomb*. Use it now on him," and Sadler jerked his head towards Smithson.

"What would you suggest?"

"Get on shore without making circuses of ourselves. I feel like bolting without even saying good-by."

"That would never do."

"I savvy that — but I ain't got no words to fit. If it was to swear, I'd be all right, but palaver like this — ah, gwan — you know how to handle it — the *Pomme-de-terre-fritters* say that you're never left when it comes to doing the proper thing at the proper time. Use your *savory fairey* as Moore calls it."

Huntingdon led Sadler around the deck, and, approaching Smithson from the other side, he yawned, wearily, and said in tired, drawling tones:

"Yes, indeed, Sadler, we've been hitting it up pretty lively since I landed on the beach. I'm just about as far gone as I can go without dropping all together. I hope this breeze keeps up — still I'm tired enough to sleep even in Hades."

"Yes, and I'm tired too," agreed Smithson, "but whether I'll sleep or not is another matter. I dread the trip ahead of me. Ten days or two weeks of monotonous misery. Traveling at a snail's pace during the day. At night tying up at a wood pile or a mangrove tree, food for mosquitoes and wet heat. Ah, well; 'tis Hell's Playground. Good-by, my friends. Good health

and good luck. They sound a farce out here — but it's the conventional good-by of the coast — and we've got to be conventional — even in farce."

He laughed in a tired, pathetic manner.

"*Au revoir*, old chap," cried Huntingdon, warmly wringing Smithson's hand and forcing life into his tones. "Until we meet again. Take care of yourself. Good luck, good health, and many, many thanks."

"Until next time, old man," was all Sadler said — all he could say.

The *Avant-Garde* was to leave on the early morning tide, so as to make the flats at Yombé Point, one of the many mouths of the Ogôwe.

From the beach Huntingdon and Sadler again called good-by and waved their hats in farewell.

Smithson leaned over the rail and smiled at them. The moonlight fell full upon him. He was all in white! He drooped, pathetically.

The deck was deserted. He was alone, but from the *salle à manger* came Moore's boisterous cry:

"*Vive La France, Pomme-de-terre-frit!*" followed by the cockney song:

Come where the booze is cheaper,
Come where the mugs hold more,
Come where the boss is a bit of a joss,
Let's go to the pub next door!

CHAPTER XIV

IN four weeks, Ngumbè arrived in a canoe.

“Master Smithson, he live for ground,” he said lightly, as though delivering news of a good time. “King Huntingdon, you fit for tek me as *houseboy*. I be proper *boy* for big White King. *Bushboy* never pas’ me for white man palaver.”

Neither by voice nor gesture did Huntingdon betray the shock to his nerves by the abrupt news of Smithson’s death.

“I fit take you, Ngumbè,” he said quietly. “Fall into your old place!”

“Hello there, Monkey Face, what’s the palaver?” rolicked Sadler.

“Smithson’s — dead — Sadler, he’s gone,” said Huntingdon.

The laughter died from Sadler’s eyes.

“What it be?” he asked gently, of Ngumbè.

“Fire ketch master’s skin. All blankets from factory, no get warm. Skin he burn, blood he cold. Him *bushwoman* mek medceen. No good. Sweat never ketch. Him ask for brandy. Master put *litre* for belly. He sleep, one day, two day, three day — worms he ketch —”

“Enough, Ngumbè!” commanded Huntingdon. “Report for duty in the morning!”

Silence fell between the two white men.

"I think Smithson must have felt it too—that it was good-by," said Sadler after a time. "Moore, the shrimp!"

Huntingdon remained silent.

How awful to die alone, in the bush, away from loved ones—from Marjorie!

Sadler literally threw Huntingdon out of the factory.

"Go hunt, do as you jolly well please, but get out of my sight. I'll not be here much longer. The *Oka'll* be soon in trim. Then you'll have to do time. But not now. *Sneak!*!"

A deeper feeling for the little skipper gripped Huntingdon. He *understood*!

Moore swaggered in to gossip of Smithson's death. But he had scarce passed the threshold of the factory, before Sadler raged:

"Get your deceitful mug out o' here, or I'll crack it for you."

Moore wanted to argue, but Sadler disappeared in the storeroom.

Huntingdon sought the *Douane*.

"*Monsieur le Douane*, Mr. Smithson, my compatriot, is dead," he announced without preamble.

"*Sacre cœur!*"

In the *créole's* handclasp lay a world of sympathy. Then he spread out his jeweled fingers, shrugged his shoulders and consoled:

"He has left *ennui, la tristesse*, this country *barbare*. He is to be envied!"

Silence fell; silence, the language of the strong; silence, the comforter of the suffering!

Huntingdon dropped on a divan. He gazed out o'er

the bay. He recalled Smithson in the moonlight; his prescience of death!

"Twas *opéra bouffe* no more! Hell's Playground was a reality!

The *Douane* picked up de Maupassant's *La Vie Errante*, and in French, with a soft, pleasing, soothing accent, he read:

" 'The frail and triangular stems of papyrus, eight or nine feet high, bore at the top round clusters of green threads, soft and flexible, like human hair. They resembled heads that had become plants, which might have been thrown into the sacred stream by one of the pagan deities who lived there in days gone by. Is it not strange that this wonderful plant, which brought to our minds the thoughts of the dead, which was the guardian of the human genius, should have on its ancient body an enormous mane of thick and flowing hair, such as poets effect? ' Is that not an exquisite thought, *mon ami*? '

Huntingdon's gray mood dissolved before the embroidery of de Maupassant and the subtle magnetism of the *créole*.

" 'Tis sublime, *mon cher ami*," he said. "I, too, feel that plants have souls. That they were once beautiful women beloved of men. As plants, flowers, they come to us, bringing fragrance and beauty and recollections to soothe us in moments of depression, of sorrow."

"True, true! When I press a flower to my lips, *mon cher* Huntingdon, in its calyx I see the eyes of her I love. Ah, woman's lips! Their nectar is Lethe for tortured souls. Life without woman is death."

The *Douane* broke another silence.

“Listen again, *mon cher ami*, what my poet says of flamingoes: ‘*Some were swimming and others stood about on their long legs. They looked like floating red and white spots, or enormous flowers, glowing on a slender red stalk. Hundreds were grouped together, either in the water or on the banks. One would think it were a hedge of carmine lilies from which emerged, as from a corolla, the blood-stained heads of birds on a long, curved neck. It was like the flight of a garden, with flower baskets, rising towards the sky, one after the other.*’”

“*Sainte Vierge!*” exclaimed Huntingdon, “what a metaphor! No one save a great soul, an exquisite, could give birth to it.”

“You’re right, *cher* Huntingdon. Such thoughts never could occur to ordinary minds. You’ve seen a flock of flamingoes in flight?”

“The pleasure is yet to be mine, *mon cher Douane*.”

“It shall be my most exquisite happiness to show you that Guy de Maupassant’s poesy is taken from life.”

“I thank you a million times, *mon cher camarade*.”

The *créole* shrugged his shoulders.

After another silence, he remarked:

“You’ve been in Turkey, without doubt.”

“Yes.”

“You’ve read *Monsieur Loti’s Des Enchanteès?*”

“Yes.”

“You like it?”

“I cannot say that I do. It seems to me a boast of the author’s *amourettes*. To boast of a woman — any sort of a woman — is unpardonable.”

“*Certainement*; 'tis a crime *enorme* to boast of the *affaires de cœur*. But the tale is too *sombre*. Such life for a woman! 'Tis death. My *créole* blood is always jealous of the woman I love, but I do not believe in shutting her up. I do not relish pale cheeks, dulled eyes and listlessness. I like the ripe, warm, luscious fruit — What do you think of your *Monsieur Hichens*' story — *The Garden of Allah?* ”

The *Douane* pronounced it *Al-lâh*, after the manner of the East.

“ 'Tis a tapestry of delight, a tracery of ideal love,” enthused Huntingdon, love glowing within him to the exclusion of every other emotion. “Would you not love a honeymoon like that, *Monsieur le Douane?* ”

“To have been all alone with the woman I love? Yes. To make her feel that she was wholly dependent upon me, that I was *tout-à-fait* dependent upon her? Yes. To live only in and for each other? Yes. But — she would have wounded me unto death had she not told me of the unborn *enfant*.”

“What you don't know cannot cause you suffering,” reasoned Huntingdon, a smile on his lips. 'Twas the *Douane* who was almost in tears now.

“Ah, but my soul would tell me that the woman I love was concealing something from me.”

“*Androvski* never would have returned to the monastery had *Domini* told him of the child.”

“*Mon Dieu*, how could he leave *une grande passion comme ça* and go into the unsympathetic monastery with its lean, unemotional priests? How could he be so *insensible*? That is no way to reward an *amour parfait*. How could he forget *les embrâces si passionnées*?

"He did not forget them. No man could ever forget such ardor."

"Then why did he leave them?" demanded the *Douane* as though he were catechising a culprit, and that culprit were *Androvski* himself.

"Because of his love for *Domini*."

The *Douane* shrugged his shoulders.

"You English are *drôle*. You leave a woman because you love her. We leave her — because love is dead."

"*Monsieur le Douane?*"

"*Oui, Monsieur Huntingdon?*"

"When *Domini* discovered *Androvski* was a monk — you recall how great was her shock?"

"*Oui, pauvre femme!*"

"*Alors.* Think you it was easy for her to come to the decision that he must go back — to that 'unsympathetic monastery, with its lean, unemotional priests'?"

"Ah, she did not need to think about it at all! She should have held him tighter, she should have kissed him all the more, she should have told him of the flower of love to bloom for them! *Non, non, l'amour est la vie!* I do not like the *Domini*. I do not like the *Androvski* — save in the desert, in the night, in the silence. Ah, Monsieur Huntingdon, you English do not know how to love — you do not know how."

Huntingdon's heart beats were quicker, his blood flowed more lively. Once again in England would *he* not know how to love? He who was starving for affection, for the love and companionship of a woman!

It was the *Douane* who broke another long silence.

"*Monsieur Huntingdon?*"

“ *Oui, Monsieur le Douane.*”

“ I have the honor to announce a very great surprise and pleasure to you.”

“ *Oui?* ”

Huntingdon’s interest and attention showed in his manner and his eyes.

“ I am going to the *chasse* with you.”

“ ‘Tis indeed a surprise and a delight, *mon ami*,” cried Huntingdon, joyously.

“ If you will lend me *les cartouches*. ”

“ All you wish and rifles too. You know I’ve a whole armory with me — thanks to the courtesy of your government. When are we off? ”

“ At your pleasure.”

“ To-morrow? ”

“ To-morrow.”

The *Douane* summoned a sergeant. He gave rapid command in French. At break of day he would set out for the chase; all must be in readiness.

A delightful day was spent and much game was bagged. The *Douane* proved himself a good shot and a general all-round sportsman.

That was the beginning of close companionship and friendship between the Englishman and the *créole*. Each continuously sought the other’s society; two well-trained intellects met and each learned something from the other. Their converse was of art and life; of philosophy and religion; of men and women. Each considered woman the masterpiece of creation, the highest form of divine expression; they regretted her absence and suffered from loneliness, yet neither of them would have willingly brought her there to that savage country. The

Douane's wife had come because she considered it her duty to do so, and while the *Douane* *lived only when she was there*, yet there was ever present the fear that illness or accident might forever take her from him. He had seen her off to Europe, glad to know that she would be at their home in Martinique, surrounded by their *flowers of love*: two little girls, *so sweet and beautiful as not to seem real*.

To Sadler, Huntingdon could talk unreservedly of his business plans, but of Marjorie, Huntingdon spoke only to the *créole*. Great were the pleasure and solace he derived therefrom, and the languid *créole*, the voluptuary, never tired of Huntingdon's description of his lady love, his dilations upon her charms and accomplishments. They brought the *créole* a new delight, a sort of reflected ardor of the faith and trust and love of his friend for the woman for whose sake he sought exile and toil.

Huntingdon spoke of Marjorie's vow to be faithful unto death, and his own pledge of fidelity through all eternity.

“ ‘Tis woman's sacred duty to be faithful,” remarked the *Douane*.

“ What about the man? ” Huntingdon demanded.

“ He means to be true,” shrugged the *Douane*, “ but when *la tristesse* tortures, *la femme* is the only relief; *la femme et l'amour*.”

“ You don't call that love,” indignantly protested the Englishman.

“ *Mon cher ami*,” and the *créole* lightly laid his jeweled fingers with their long polished nails upon Huntingdon's arm and said kindly, “ love is a word applied

to many emotions and morality is a point of view — please don't let us discuss it. Come, let's play *écarté*; we'll while away the heavy hours with the Goddess of Chance, who is but another manifestation of bewitching woman. Come," and the friends gambled recklessly through the dragging hours of many a long, monotonous, tropical night.

CHAPTER XV

MEANWHILE, shortly after Smithson's death, Sadler, in command of the little *Oka*, set out with cargo for the Ogôwe.

For the first time in his life, Huntingdon was thrown upon himself, and he met the occasion.

He gave short, strict orders to his servants. No slackness; no disorder. Delinquents would be dismissed and never taken back.

Itula had charge of the factory; Ngumbè of the house; Makàya of the galley.

Ngumbè was always to wear fresh whites. They would be furnished by his master.

The bungalow was thoroughly cleansed. Changes in it were planned and designs were made for new furniture. Both were to be finished by Christmas. Besides, drawings were made for a new bungalow, which was to be ready next June, when Huntingdon's term of service with Holt had expired.

Sadler recommended the Catholic fathers at Lamberné as expert builders, carpenters and carvers, and Huntingdon gave them *carte blanche* to go ahead.

He was happy, genuinely happy.

He reveled in doing — with no one to say him nay.

Five days in the week were devoted to business. Saturday and Sunday were given to the chase, and the evenings to the *Douane*.

The weather was ideal. It was Africa's winter. Huntingdon gloried in it. Cape Lopez seemed the most delightful spot on earth.

Late in August the British gunboat *Dwarf* put in for her annual recruit.

Her arrival gave new zest to affairs.

Hunt followed hunt, and entertainment, entertainment.

Sadler was down, Moore was again welcomed.

Cape Lopez never before knew such revelry, such hunting. No man lagged behind.

The game bagged was far beyond the quantity and kind permitted by the government.

But what mattered that? Were not the *Douane*, the *Commandant* and the *Chef de Poste* of the party?

And was not that Hunters' Paradise, the Plains of Mandji, worthy of those mighty hunts?

Huntingdon's shooting was marvelous. He drank nothing when after big game. He never lost sight of his danger. He owed it to Marjorie to take the best care possible of himself. He preserved and shipped to her and to his father game rare even in the great museums of the world.

Though his interest was keen in the okapi, Duyker antelopes and a giant, black pig, Huntingdon's greatest enthusiasm was for the gorilla. His captive stood over six feet high and so human was he in some respects that Huntingdon was not only fascinated but frightened. For hours he watched and studied the anthropoid; his ears, though inordinately small for his huge body, were perfect as a man's; he walked upright; he used his foot as a hand and enormous strength was in his long,

muscular arms. With them he beat furiously upon his stout iron cage; he seemed to know that Huntingdon was his jailer, and, at his approach, the ape raged furiously. He refused to eat; and at night his cries were especially shrill and of a peculiar character; he seemed to be appealing to his friends of the bush for release, and time and time again they answered him. The sixth night of his capture he escaped and there was every evidence that outside aid had been rendered him.

Huntingdon had more faith than ever in Darwin's theory. He felt confident that the mystery of the missing link was contained in the shadowy bush about him; he wished he had time to pursue the matter exhaustively, but he was there not as a student, but as a worker; he had much to do and a limited time in which to accomplish it.

Huntingdon's fame as a dead sure shot had traveled far and wide.

From his bush town came Chief Ragundo.

For months a leopard had been terrifying the people. Traps had been set, but the wily bush cat had evaded them, and raid after raid had been successfully made by him. A four-year-old child had been the last victim, and the natives were so frightened that they feared to venture forth even in the brilliant light of day.

Chief Ragundo begged the Great White King to dispatch the marauder.

Huntingdon's blood was up. The bush and its ways were now pretty familiar to him. He determined the leopard and he would have an argument.

The moon was big, the night still. Not a sound was

heard, save the crying of a gazelle imprisoned in the trap set for the leopard.

With Ogula and Nkömbi Kakhi, Huntingdon took up his vigil.

One, two, three hours passed.

No sign of the leopard.

The natives lay asleep, they were tired.

The bush hid the sea from Huntingdon's gaze, but he heard the gentle murmur of the water. It brought him messages of her, the woman who constantly filled his thoughts. While his body was in Afriea and he sat on the ground, his gun on his knee, his eyes on the moonlit space over which the leopard must pass to reach the gazelle, his thoughts were in England. He was with his beloved; they were on the Thames in a boat. He was holding her sunshade. He was telling her how becoming white was to her, when bang!

A shot rang out, the natives jumped to their feet.

Huntingdon discovered himself on his stomach, his discharged gun in his hand, while thirty yards away lay a leopard — stone dead — a soft-nosed bullet in his brain!

Huntingdon's subconscious mind made the kill.

Great was the rejoicing among the *Ouroungoes*. The whole tribe adopted Huntingdon as their *Mpolo Tata Otangani*; their Great White King; they vowed eternal friendship; they brought him many trophies of the chase. What more fitting thing for such a mighty Nimrod? They promised an elephant hunt in his honor.

In all the season's hunting only two elephants had been taken by the white men, and Huntingdon was

anxious to learn how the savages brought down the big pachyderms. With joy he received the announcement of the hunt and eagerly he looked forward to it. His guns were primed, his ammunition ready and he was prepared to set out any time. But day after day went by and time had tolled up a month without any sign from the natives.

The leopard's skin, an unusually large and handsome one, was tanned and hung in the factory where natives flocked to see it, and more wonderful than ever and more exaggerated were the tales they told of the Great White King.

His eye was so powerful that he charmed any wild beast and rendered him harmless!

He had a magic box in which were charms to cure any disease!

There was another box out of which came the most wonderful sounds. The natives hung about just to hear it. Their own music is primitive, monotonous, something after the solemn chant for the dead. Their surprise then was great at melodies of popular, fast-moving songs. Those who understood English caught a word here and there and strutted about like children interpreting to less fortunate ones and adding something of their own. According to them, the songs were of the valorous deeds of the Great White King and of his conquest of the whole world and the destruction of all his enemies!

Thus Huntingdon's fame grew and was noised about the land. People came days' journeys to look upon him — to trade in his factory, and he profited by cleaning out old stock. The big order he sent in for new

merchandise caused great comment in the home office. The tenderfoot was surely doing great things. His career was watched with interest.

Huntingdon had given up all hope of the great native elephant hunt, when to his surprise, Ogula announced that at last all was ready and the start was to be made *proper early* the next morning.

The lure of the chase was again quick within the white man and eagerly and joyfully he set out. He was far from a tenderfoot now; he was hardened and in the best possible physical condition. He was properly dressed without one ounce of superfluous clothing. He wore low canvas shoes with rubber soles; puttees of tough, tan leather; a tan blouse of silk and wool; a dark green helmet, and though his green khakis were worse for wear, they were serviceable and inconspicuous.

After a long, arduous march, Huntingdon was disappointed and disgusted to find a poor pachyderm in his death throes, a keen knife having pierced his brain with peculiar exactness.

Huntingdon ended the beast's agony.

Then he examined the trap. He found it very ingenuous. Between two trees was fixed a horizontal bar, from which hung a weighted spear, kept in position by a cord of tough bush rope held down by a stake directed horizontally towards the middle of the trap and by another, which at a convenient angle, was interposed between this and the end.

The elephant had struck with his feet and loosened the contrivance. It fell violently and the knife caught the victim in the spot where the brain unites with the nape of the neck.

Huntingdon appreciated the suddenness of the blow and its great force. The knife in his neck, the poor beast struggles until he dies !

Huntingdon was astounded at the size of the elephant ; he was a full grown male and weighed at least four tons !

The natives were delighted with the kill.

The coarse, rank flesh, still smoking, was cut up and distributed among them. Portions of the trunk and the feet were reserved for Huntingdon, while a huge lump of meat was set apart for Chief Ragundo in whose town the night was to be passed and the festivities held.

Huntingdon resolved to also reward Ragundo with his share of the spoil. Baked elephant feet didn't appeal to him, and the trunk is tough.

Huntingdon turned away from the hacking of the still warm flesh. He imagined the corpse to be a human being, and the natives quarreling over it !

He also pondered on the laziness of the negroes. In direct contrast to the Malay and other Eastern peoples, the equatorial savages do not domesticate the elephant, or any other animal. Huntingdon was saddened for the moment. What if, after all, the natives should fail him as laborers ? But, again, he put thoughts of failure from him ; he relaxed and his thoughts were of Marjorie, his beloved. He was content with his progress so far and he longed for the year to be up when he could go it alone.

Suddenly, and, unceremoniously, Huntingdon was hauled from his position by Ogula, the shootman.

“ Death he live. Medceen for him bite, no live.”

Not a foot from where Huntingdon had sat was a

cobra, the most deadly snake in all Africa! Slowly his body became erect; the skin on either side of his head was dilated until it stood out like a hood, and making a noise like an angry cat, the serpent spat forth venom with such force that it carried for at least eight feet!

Ogula pointed to his own eyes and a great cut on his leg and said:

“If them spit ketch man here and here, he live for ground one time.”

“*Awaka*,”¹ was the only word uttered by the white man for the great service rendered him. It was spoken lazily, almost indifferently. Then he gave command to begin the march towards Chief Ragundo’s town.

They had advanced some distance in silence, when suddenly Ogula whispered:

“Master, I look for ear² all same like elephant hunt him *chop*.”

Huntingdon listened, and he heard, in the bush beyond, a tugging as though a tree were being deftly uprooted.

Ogula bade the rest of the hunting party remain in silence while the white man, Nkombi Kakhi and himself went ahead to see what was the palaver.

Because of the keenly, strongly developed sense of smell of the elephant, Ogula kept to the leeward, advancing cautiously and signaling the others to do the same. ’Twas towards four o’clock and there wasn’t any wind—a great thing in their favor. For the winds of Africa are constantly veering, and constitute one of the greatest difficulties in elephant stalking. On the other hand, the sight of the elephant is defective and he does not hear

¹ Thanks.

² Hear.

good. It is therefore possible to approach him from the leeward to within a very short distance. And this was what the learned Ogula was doing.

Unmindful of impeding undergrowth and swaying overgrowth, straight as a crow flies, the savage cautiously led the way in direction of the uprooting sound.

With his gun Ogula pointed off to the edge of the bush where a small stream flowed and beyond which was a sandy plain.

Huntingdon beheld a marvelous sight: a tusker and a cow were intelligently helping each other to overthrow a tree that they might eat of its root!

In the bush a dismal silence reigned. The shadows were already darkening. But in the full bright light of the open the elephants made a glorious target.

Yet, it was impossible to shoot from where the hunters lay. The tangled bush intervened.

Now came the most ticklish part of the adventure. To creep forward so as not to disturb the animals, then sight and fire.

Suddenly, the cow lifted up her head and loudly trumpeted!

Like a leaping leopard, Ogula took the bush and ran parallel to the elephants!

Gone was all attempt of concealment!

The beasts had scented danger!

The cow placed herself directly in front of the tusker and trumpeted defiance!

Deftly Nkömbi Kakhi hurled his spear!

It rebounded from the cow's trunk! She tramped it to pieces!

Huntingdon, too, tore through the bush and made for an opening.

He sighted. He fired. Down went the cow, a bullet under her ear!

Off towards the plain started the tusker, and Huntingdon's bullet caught him in the thigh. He stopped suddenly in his flight, faced about, lifted his trunk, trumpeted violently, and retraced his steps across the stream. The cow was also on her feet. Both started at almost incredible speed towards Huntingdon!

Huntingdon was fully alive to his danger, but there was comfort in the thought that Ogula, the shootman, and Nkömbi Kakhi, his brother, were at hand.

As he sighted, he retreated a little within the tangled bush, but, alas, he backed into a tree, his helmet was sent flying from his head and he stumbled! He knew he made a mistake; the intervening bush would divert his shot. If he remained where he was the beasts had him at their mercy!

Where was Ogula, and why didn't his gun speak? And Nkömbi Kakhi, his brother, why did he not make his presence known? It is true his spear was broken but he had his great knife and he might do something to divert the direction of the maddened animals!

On, on, on came the beasts, the bush crackling loud under their ponderous, quick tread! What was he to do?

The beasts were within a few feet of him, it was now or never — he dropped his gun — he sprang, he caught the branch of a tree — his legs just swung clear when the elephants passed under them!

He felt the rush of wind accompanying their great

speed, he smelled the strong odors from their bodies and they were so big and wild that the very bush was rent aside as they continued their flight.

Huntingdon descended and picked up his gun.

“Ogula, Nkömbi Kakhi!” he commanded, sharply.

There was no answer.

The retreat of the elephants died away in the distance. Silence, dismal and profound, reigned!

Why had the savages deserted him? He hadn’t any idea of direction! There wasn’t a path of any sort, save the broken trail made by the elephants!

Night was near — night with its horrors. Huntingdon had nothing with which to defend himself except a gun. A gun was useless in the dark!

Suddenly, from the rear there came a breaking of undergrowth. It indicated a struggle, and restored Huntingdon’s courage and caution.

With finger on trigger, Huntingdon advanced towards the sound. He felt confident something was happening to his hunters!

And he was right!

He stopped, literally rooted with amazement; without a thought of using his gun!

Shoulder to shoulder and facing an enraged leopard were Ogula, the shootman, and Nkömbi Kakhi, his brother!

Like carved images were the brothers, their eyes steady in those of the treacherous, aroused cat!

Self-preservation was alive within them. They were as alert, as determined as the cat herself. They were beasts glaring at a beast!

Ogula’s gun lay at his feet where he didn’t dare stoop

to get it. Even had he dared stoop, Huntingdon saw with horror that his right arm hung helpless at his side. He was unarmed. But not so his brother, Nkömbi Kakhi. The latter clutched his hunting knife in his right hand. His muscles were tensed ready to use it!

The cat was on a bough on a line with the foreheads of the brothers and only a few feet distant. Keeping her eyes in those of the men, she softly lowered on her haunches, stretched her legs and sprang!

Huntingdon could scarcely believe his eyes, as the brothers parted, one to either side, and through the space occupied by their bodies, leapt the cat!

Huntingdon came to life. He fired.

The steel bullet went clear through the cat!

The wounded beast turned, and faced, not the brothers, but Huntingdon!

Her eyes glowed through the dusk like discs of angry fire. Saliva ran from her sharp-pointed, yellow decayed teeth gleaming like cruel executioners in the open, snarling mouth. Her face was wrinkled, distorted with sardonic rage. Her tawny, brown-spotted flanks heaved like tortured bellows!

She was wounded. Her temper was ten-fold uglier.

Motionless, helpless, stood the white man!

The beast's eyes were full in his. He was fascinated by the grace of the beautiful creature, spellbound by the magnificent demonstration of infuriated rage and malignity. He knew death was there. But he could not help it. He never thought of Ogula and Nkömbi Kakhi. He saw nothing, knew nothing, save the beast rampant and vindictive just a few yards from him!

Then, slowly the cat crept towards him. She dis-

dained to spring. This human creature was at her mercy! She put out her claw to fell him, when involuntarily Huntingdon dropped to the ground.

He awaited his death. He uttered one word: *Marjorie!*

It contained a world of regret, but not a quiver of fear!

He felt the cat's breath on his neck, her claw on his back — then — a form leaped over him —

“ *Master, master, master!* ” came Nkömbi Kakhi's tense tones.

Huntingdon leaped to his feet and saw Nkömbi Kakhi's knife in the throat of the beast, and Nkömbi Kakhi's hands digging into her windpipe, while he exerted all his strength to hold her!

Ogula with his left arm smashed his blunderbuss over the cat's head!

Fighting in *extremis*, with insistent devilish rage, she plunged her claws deep in the bare breast of the brave Nkömbi Kakhi!

Huntingdon knew he must pull himself together, get the cat, or Nkömbi Kakhi was done for.

He placed his gun under her ear and riddled her with shot.

She died, writhing sinuously, her beautiful body swaying gracefully even after the breath had left her lungs!

White man and two black men looked into each other's eyes — equal to equal — then, slowly, Huntingdon reached out both hands and grasped those of his preservers.

“ *Akawa*, Nkömbi Kakhi, *akawa*, Ogula, his brother, *akawa mpolo mpolo!* ”¹

“ Aye,” grunted the brothers in unison, “ *akawa*, *Mpolo Ogantani*, Master! ”

“ Aye,” answered Huntingdon, feelingly.

Nkömbi Kakhi cleansed his wounds with moist earth, then over them he rubbed the milk from the leaf of a low bush.

Huntingdon examined Ogula’s arm. It was broken at the elbow. A shoulder break would not have been so bad. Huntingdon had two bones instead of one to deal with. But he never hesitated.

He propped Ogula against the tree, and, pressing his knee against the giant’s breast, he exerted all his strength and snapped the dislocated bones into position.

Not a muscle of Ogula’s stolid face moved, although the pain must have been intense.

The arm was placed in bamboo splints and securely bound with bush rope.

No thanks came the second time from the great Ogula, nor from Nkömbi Kakhi, his brother.

“ Them arm, how him break? ” Huntingdon asked of Ogula.

“ When master go for shoot elephants, me, Ogula, here something for back. I fear leopard. I fear um jump for white man and *chop* him. Me, Ogula, brudder to Nkömbi Kakhi, no see cat for ground. For top I look um. Me, Ogula, brudder for Nkömbi Kakhi, fall for ground. Arm he come hard and mek so. Fear no live for Ogula. Fear only live for um master, King

¹ Thanks, very much, thanks, great thanks!

Huntingdon. Them cat he come. Me, Ogula, I wait. My brudder, Nkömbi Kakhi, he live. Me, Ogula, and him brudder, Nkömbi Kakhi, look them cat for eye. Um come, me, Ogula and Nkömbi Kakhi, him brudder, mek so," and Ogula leaped to one side.

"Nkömbi Kakhi be proper brother for Ogula, the shootman," said Huntingdon, admiration in his tones.

"Aye," grunted the savage.

"And you, Nkömbi Kakhi, how you *look*¹ them leopard?"

"Me!" and Nkömbi Kakhi arose to his full height. He acted his words, vividly, dramatically. "After them *njogo*² kill spear for Nkömbi Kakhi, um wonder for um head why them gun of um brudder Ogula, never mek noise? Um hear someone come for ground. Um fear for um brudder, Ogula, the shootman. Um creep forward, softly, softly — so. Um see all t'ing for um eye. Um brudder, Ogula, the shootman. Them cat. Them cat um eye look them eye of my brudder. Me, I savvy what them cat t'ink. Me, I go softly, softly, so. Me, I stan' by my brudder, Ogula, the shootman. Me, Nkömbi Kakhi, I fear only for my brudder. Them cat he come, so — me an' my brudder mek — so — Master, um gun speak. Palaver finish!"

The simple, dramatic recital thrilled the white man through and through.

Such courage, such sublime indifference to death, such confidence in their own powers! Civilization knows nothing beyond!

Huntingdon was awed into silence, then weakness

¹ *Look* is always used for *see*.

² Elephant.

came o'er him, the weakness of fear, from which Ogula, the shootman, aroused him.

"Master, night he ketch. Must tek walk for Chief Ragundo's town."

But it was too dark to proceed through the bush without a light.

Nkömbi Kakhi stripped great pieces of bark from trees rich with rosin, and, carrying a lighted torch in each hand, he led the way.

Their incense was a relief from the jungle's dank breath, and Huntingdon inhaled great draughts of it.

The rest of the hunting party was found seated in silence where Ogula bade them remain.

At sight of the wounded men, they commenced to jabber excitedly, but with a gesture Nkömbi Kakhi silenced them.

More bush-lights were procured, and the march was made to Chief Ragundo's town, where great preparations had been made to welcome the Great White King.

In the center of the common and only street of the town, the reception took place.

Huge fires leaped high into space, casting a romantic, softening glow over sordid surroundings of dirt and squalor.

Chief Ragundo was tall, stately and dignified. Royally he carried his ridiculous clothing, an old cloth, a flannelet nightshirt and a ragged straw hat, and in his right hand he bore a carved ebony staff, the sign of his rank.

He saluted the white man gravely, while his people fell on one knee, laid their right hands on their heads, then on their breasts, acknowledging allegiance and render-

ing homage to the Great White King. Such honor had not been accorded a white man in many a year.

Huntingdon was seated on a camp chair before a blazing fire, on the smoke side. Smoke keeps away mosquitoes.

Chief Ragundo solemnly seated himself upon a crude ebony stool, facing Huntingdon.

The quiet dignity of the old chief and the silent, respectful attitude of his people pleased Huntingdon and impressed him. A visit to one of the civilized courts of Europe could not have been more solemn or ceremonious, and Huntingdon's manner towards the negro chief was that which he would have employed before his own sovereign, save that he would have remained standing.

But what Huntingdon was not aware of was the imposing figure he himself presented in the full light of the brilliant fire, at ease and self-confident, surrounded by black, nude savages, whose stolid countenances masked their admiration of him and their delight at having honored their town with his presence.

A slave brought forth gifts for the white man and laid them at his feet. They consisted of plantains, chickens, *manioc*, bottles of palm-oil, bunches of palm-nuts and hand-woven mats.

The oldest son of the chief acted as spokesman. His cloth was spun from pineapple fiber and over his left shoulder was carelessly thrown a white tunic, adding majesty to his tall, slender form.

Between Chief Ragundo and the white man and in front of the encircling savages he took up his stand; he gazed into the face of the white man for a full minute,

then amidst solemn silence and in the *Ouroongo* dialect, he spoke slowly and impressively, after the manner of the savage, using appropriate and eloquent gestures.

“Ragundo, the Great Chief of the *Ouroungoes*, and all his peuples, bade welcome the Great White King Huntingdon and all his people. The black man was always friend to the English, and the English had always treated the black man proper, proper. The *Ouroungoes* had no love in their hearts for the French. They do not understand the *mouth*¹ of the French. But many *Ouroungoes* spoke *mouth* of the English.

“Ragundo, the Great Chief of the *Ouroungoes*, looked shame from the bottom of his heart that he had not more or richer gifts for the Great White King Huntingdon. But, alas, the French had recently raided his town for *neppo*² and stolen everything he had not had a chance to hide.

“The plantain, *manioc* and palm-nuts were for the men of the Great White King Huntingdon. The chickens, the palm-oil and the mats were for the Great White King himself.

“Ragundo, the Great Chief of the *Ouroungoes*, and all him peuples, would never make war palaver with the Great White King and him peuples the English. All would dwell in peace, as brothers.”

The spokesman stopped and turned to Ngumbè, who stood just behind his master's chair.

It was Ngumbè's duty to interpret.

’Midst solemn silence, Ngumbè, fully appreciating the occasion and the honor vested in him, advanced slowly and with great dignity until he was directly in

¹ Language.

² Taxes.

front of his master on a line with the spokesman, then, gazing steadily into the white man's face, in pidgin English, he translated slowly and accurately.

As Ngumbè finished, all eyes were focused upon the white man. It was his turn to make answer.

Directly addressing Ngumbè, and in pidgin English, Huntingdon spoke slowly and solemnly and in the third person, as the savage had done.

"Huntingdon, the Great White King, was pleased to look Ragundo, the Great Chief of the *Ouroungoes*, him town and him peoples.

"Huntingdon, the Great White King, thanked Ragundo, the Great Chief of the *Ouroungoes*, for the gifts presented unto him and his men.

"Huntingdon, the Great White King, had brought gifts, proper gifts, for Ragundo, the Great Chief of the *Ouroungoes*, and him peoples. There were cloth, rum, tobacco, clay pipes, matches and a great bag of salt. Besides, there was elephant meat, just killed.

"Huntingdon, the Great White King, was glad to know that Ragundo, the Great Chief of the *Ouroungoes*, and him peoples, were his friends, his brothers.

"Huntingdon, the Great White King, appreciated to the bottom of him heart the great welcome accorded him. He regretted to the bottom of him heart that sunup on next day must find him on the return march to him factory, where plenty work-palaver live for him to attend to. But some time again Huntingdon, the Great White King, would take walk to the town of Ragundo, the Great Chief of the *Ouroungoes*.

"Huntingdon, the Great White King, would always

be a friend to Ragundo, the Great Chief of the *Ourooungoes*, and there would never be any fight-palaver between them."

Again solemn silence.

Again Ngumbè solemnly stepped forth and, directly addressing Chief Ragundo in the *Ourooungoo* tongue he interpreted his master's speech.

Through his son, the chief thanked the white man and again Ngumbè interpreted.

Then Mbèga brought forth the white man's gifts and laid them at the feet of Chief Ragundo.

No smile, no expression of appreciation broke over the countenance of the old chief, although the gifts were the greatest he had ever received.

He spoke long and impressively, not to his son, as he had done before, but to Ngumbè.

Again, as befitting a state interpreter, Ngumbè translated slowly and solemnly.

"Ragundo, the Great Chief of the *Ourooungoes*, look joy for him heart because of the gifts *mpolo* of the Great White King Huntingdon.

"But Ragundo, the Great Chief of the *Ourooungoes*, was poor, very, very poor. So were him peeples. Unless the Great White King Huntingdon gave him *three francs argent with which to pay his neppo to the French government*, Ragundo, the Great Chief of the *Ourooungoes*, must suffer the ignominy of arrest and imprisonment!"

"If such calamity should happen, Ragundo, the Great Chief of the *Ourooungoes*, would forever look shame before the eyes of him peeples!"

The sublime and the ridiculous; tragedy and *opéra bouffe!* But not so much as a wink of an eyelash betrayed Huntingdon's humor.

Through Ngumbè, he made fitting answer.

“Huntingdon, the Great White King, would not only pay the yearly *neppo* of the great and illustrious Chief of the *Oroungoes*, but of every male in his town!”

The offer was received in a manner worthy of its munificence.

The old chief bowed his head and his people drew nearer. The white man's generosity was the greatest they had ever experienced, and his wealth must be the wealth of the whole world. Thus Huntingdon's fame expanded into awe.

There were exactly *eleven* men in the town subject to taxation. Huntingdon's munificence represented *thirty-three francs* in cash! Nothing at all to the white man, but it saved eleven freeborn natives the ignominy of arrest and imprisonment by an alien government for the nonpayment of taxes!

The palaver was slow and tedious, but neither by sign nor gesture did Huntingdon betray his weariness. The events of the day had been very stirring; Huntingdon was hungry and dreadfully fatigued. He wished to retire, to get off his clothing, to stretch out at full length, but he did not know how to end the palaver and he would not for anything offend the *Oroungoes*.

The mother of Chief Ragundo advanced. She was so old and shriveled that her skin hung from her bones; her face was that of a cadaver, her hands and feet were claws, her breasts were dried and wrinkled like old fruit and between her toothless gums was a clay pipe.

In silence she proffered something done up in a dried plantain leaf, securely tied with bush rope.

Solemnly Ngumbè removed the wrapping and disclosed — an egg!

It might have been the Kohinoor diamond, so majestically were the Great White King's thanks tendered by the important Ngumbè, accompanied by two heads of tobacco.

The old woman stared at such prodigality, then, grabbing the tobacco, without a word, she fled into the darkness.

“What next?” was Huntingdon's weary conjecture. But relief was at hand.

Makàya unceremoniously announced *chop!*

Jabbering and gesticulating, the natives drew away.

Huntingdon enjoyed his supper alone. It was served on a folding table, under the extended grass-mat roof of a house set off by itself and especially cleansed for him.

From empty bottles bush-lights spluttered, lighting his table and breathing subtle soothing incense on Huntingdon's tired nerves. Then to his nostrils was wafted the appetizing odor of roasting beef, which, about three hundred feet away, was arranged on huge racks ingeniously constructed from green wood over blazing fires.

In picturesque abandon, the natives sat or lay on the ground, their voices mingling with the crackling of the firewood, their minds intent on the approaching feast.

O'er men and children was the charm of the equatorial tropical night, of Africa, of the fire's soft glow. In the heavens the moon was so white and big and brilliant

that other planets of the first magnitude were completely blotted out.

Just beyond the town was the dense bush, from whose mysterious depths, now and then, came the protests of its denizens, angry because fire, a more potent beast than they, curtailed their roaming.

Oh, the witchery of it all; the romance! They opened the flood-gates of Huntingdon's very soul and he surrendered unto them. He was a white man, alone, thousands of miles from the land that gave him birth, surrounded by wild beasts and venomous serpents; by untrammelled space; by great stretches of solemn silences; by forests, jungles, plains, savannahs; by savages, who feared, served and protected where they could have braved, commanded and destroyed!

Strange, indeed, this thing: this dominance of the white complexion over those of darker hues! Strange, indeed, the tranquillity of the white man in an environment hostile to him in every way!

Then came the memory of the day's hunt, almost incredible in its events. Brave Ogula, the shootman, and Nkömbi Kakhi, his brother! They should never want as long as Huntingdon lived, for to them he owed his life; and some day, when he had finished with Africa, he would relate it all to Marjorie. He foresaw the sympathy in her expressive eyes, he felt the pressure of her magnetic fingers.

A shout arose from the fires.

The meat was roasted.

In friendly groups the natives sat about eating it.

The world was merry with feasting and the music of happy voices; the fires died down and fair Diane ruled

supreme. The night was as bright as day, the shadows sharply defined as in sunlight time.

Suddenly, out of the bush, there rolled the long notes of a lion's roar.

It vibrated through the shadowy bush, it o'erleaped the babel of tongues and smote the ear of the white man. He seemed to be the only one who heard it. It thrilled him beyond expression.

His eyes tried to pierce the dense shadows from whence the sounds rolled. He pictured the tawny, lean lion, the King of Beasts, his head thrown back, his mouth open, his mighty lungs forcing the air through his mighty throat!

Again the roar! It was a succession of sonorous wave sounds coming nearer and nearer, gaining in volume and strength until the very earth vibrated beneath them.

Such full, round notes Huntingdon had never heard in all his life. He had heard lions roar in menageries, but the sound was not the same. No wild beast is the same in captivity. He is artificial, like his imprisonment.

The roar was near at hand, at Huntingdon's rear.

He turned, expecting to see the beast advance into the open.

No fear was the white man's. The King of Beasts is worthy of his title. He attacks only when he fears attack.

Suddenly the roar came from another direction. It was farther away; it rolled into dense space, then died out. Was the lion uttering his defiance at the intrusion of man, or was he simply calling his mate?

The bush became strangely silent and empty. Huntingdon was sorry. He would have liked the roaring to continue indefinitely.

The babel among the natives had ceased.

They were grouped closer together.

Then the night breeze brought a low voice to Huntingdon's ear.

'Twas that of Nkömbi Kakhi.

What he said, the white man could not interpret, for he spoke in the *Orouongo* tongue. But whatever the *bushman's* tale, it was listened to in solemn silence.

Nkömbi Kakhi was minutely retailing and pantomiming the adventures of the day.

It was Huntingdon, the Great White King, who strangled the leopard with his slim white hands!

It was he who had killed two elephants with one shot!

It was he who had dispatched the ready-to-spring cobra!

It was he who had set the broken shoulder of Ogula, the giant shootman!

It was he who put magic on the wounds of Nkömbi Kakhi, and Nkömbi Kakhi declared he already felt the healing of the hurt!

The adventures were an hour in the telling. But no one interrupted. Chief Ragundo was as interested as were his people. So were Mbèga, Makàya, Ngumbè and the others who were not with the white man when the stirring events were happening.

The silence after their recital endured for a full moment.

"Aye, it be so," then grunted Ogula, the shootman!

Huntingdon knew nothing of the additional fame thrust upon him, and when, like a great shade, Chief Ragundo arose before him and muttered solemnly:

“*Otangani, Mpolo Tata, Mpolo Tata,*”¹ Huntingdon wondered what it was all about.

Suiting his tones to the old savage’s, he as gravely responded:

“*Ragundo, Mpolo Tata, Mpolo Tata.*”

Again the chief summoned his people, and an enormous *tam-tam* was presented to the white man. The drum was a log fully ten feet long, smoke-grimed and blackened with age. It was only partly hollow with a narrow, oblong slit in the side. Two men seated themselves on the ground and resting the drum horizontally on their extended feet, they beat upon the aperture with rounded, heavy sticks, causing a deep sound to come forth, which Ngumbè declared could be heard a distance of twenty-five miles!

“It be so, Master,” corroborated Nkombi Kakhi. “Him speak from one bush town to another; him tell when Frenchmans come to make thief-palaver for we peoples.”

Two other gifts followed: an ebony stool and an immense clay pipe, both crudely carved. As specimens of native handiwork, the gifts were unique and exceedingly interesting.

But Huntingdon never betrayed his interest. “*Awaka*” was all he said.

“Aye,” grunted Ragundo in response.

The fires were replenished and the festivities began.

¹ White man, great king, great king.

Huntingdon watched the dance until the rum and *mimbo* entered the heads of the performers. Then, unnoticed, he retired to his quarters.

His camp bed and mosquito bar had been set up in the *fetish* house, from which everything had been removed except several *fetishes* and some huge grass mats, which hung on the horizontal walls of bamboo. Huntingdon closely examined the *fetishes* and discovered them to be red parrot feathers, tied together with plaited fiber; others were round disks of something dark and soft like putty, in which were embedded red berries, hard and lustrous. The mats were marvels of coloring and perfect weaving. The mesh was very fine; the background was pale golden and through it ran a shadow design of tomato-red squares, while the edges were finished with short, fine fringe of tomato-red and deep yellow. Huntingdon wondered what they were used for, and longed to possess them.

Huntingdon had scarcely tucked the mosquito bar under him, when Ngumbè entered, followed by a *bush-girl*.

Not even when he acted as interpreter did Ngumbè carry himself with such pomp. He was the bearer of a great gift from Chief Ragundo. Moreover, he knew his master had not yet accepted a native wife and he was proud to be her escort!

“The deuce!” muttered Huntingdon.

He couldn’t insult his host by sending the girl back. He wouldn’t insult Marjorie, his beloved, by accepting her. When he promised to be true, he meant it. The men of his race never broke their word. On the other hand, black women were disgusting to him. He knew

none of them were virgins; none of them were cleanly. But, everything else aside, to share a negress with a black man was something he could *not* do!

“Ngumbè, say *akawa* to Ragundo, Great Chief of the *Ouroungoes*. King Huntingdon appreciates his great gift.”

Huntingdon couldn’t see what the girl looked like. The hut was lighted only by the fires which gleamed through the bamboo splits, causing her and Ngumbè to loom up like great shades. But Huntingdon knew she would, of course, be young and desirable. The chief would send him none other.

“Him be daughter for Chief Ragundo,” said Ngumbè.

“All right. Good night, Ngumbè. Lef’ um here.”

What was Huntingdon to do with the girl?

She remained standing in the shadows.

Treat ‘em all like dogs, or they’ll get the best of you.

Old Wallace’s warning leaped suddenly through Huntingdon’s brain.

Huntingdon smiled. The warning wasn’t necessary. He knew his own strength. No black woman could tempt him!

But what was he to do with the girl?

To his great surprise, she addressed him in English.

“Master Huntingdon, I look you.”

Her voice was young, liquid and soft.

“Come here!”

She came to his bedside. She stood between him and the light. Her body was sharply outlined. It was slender. The hips curved ever so slightly and she wore only a scant loin cloth.

She had evidently been brought up at a mission. She would know something of the ways of the white man. He would feign sickness.

“What’s your name?”

“E-lin-da.”

“E-lin-da, you savvy when white man be sick?”

“For belly?”

The *banal* word grated on Huntingdon.

“Yes.”

“You tek medceen?”

“Yes.”

Huntingdon drank a great draught of brandy. He was sparring for time, wondering what to do next.

Again the girl spoke:

“You *marry* me?”

What *was* he to do?

“I fit marry you for *two* francs,” she added.

She was certainly not slow about her wooing.

“I fit — when belly ketch well again.”

The girl was silent.

Huntingdon felt her sullenness.

But he would soon banish that.

“E-lin-da, you want fine cloth and fine kerchief; fine past all *Orouongo* women?”

“I want,” answered the girl, quickly and eagerly.

Huntingdon knew how to handle her now.

“When day ketch, King Huntingdon fit for dash E-lin-da something fine pas’ all *Orouongo* women. Take them mat,” and Huntingdon indicated those given him by the old chief, “put them for ground and go to sleep, one time. Proper morning I fit for give you them t’ings.”

“ And you never marry me? ”

“ When — skin him ketch proper well.”

He couldn’t bring himself to again use that awful word.

She stretched herself on the ground at his feet.

Without, the fires still blazed. The natives were proper drunk. Pandemonium reigned supreme, but Huntingdon slept the sleep of exhaustion.

In the morning, he awoke before the girl.

Quietly, he arose and from a trunk he took a gorgeous yellow and purple silk handkerchief and a cloth woven in Europe especially for Africa. Its background was a rich, dark green and in the center there was a huge peacock of brilliant yellow. The border was a conventional scroll design in crimson. The clash of colors offended the white man, but when he awakened the girl and her eyes fell upon the gifts, they lighted up with pleasure, and she eagerly possessed herself of them.

Over her old cloth she wrapped the new one, then, before his shaving glass, which Huntingdon held for her, she arranged the kerchief into an oblong turban, pulling it low on her forehead. It was very becoming to the shape of her face and her ebony skin, and the brilliant cloth effectively outlined her sinuous, youthful figure. She was good to look upon, as she smiled her pleasure, showing perfect, small, white teeth.

Huntingdon added two francs to his gifts.

The girl was eager to show off her finery, and left without a word of thanks.

What a relief!

Huntingdon hoped, for old Chief Ragundo’s sake, she would remember only the gifts.

Ngumbè entered. He was wreathed in insinuating smiles.

Huntingdon appeared not to notice them.

Mkàya, too, grinned, when he served early coffee.

Huntingdon was delighted. Perhaps now they would let him alone on woman-palaver.

But it was not to be so.

As he was leaving the town, through Ngumbè, Rangundo demanded if the white man did not want to take his daughter home with him?

Huntingdon had to acquiesce.

She joined his caravan.

With envy, the other women watched her go. She strutted like a peacock rigged out in her new, gaudy finery.

The greatest honor possible had come to her. She was to be the wife of Huntingdon, the Great White King!

Huntingdon swore — beneath his breath — and wondered how he'd get out of the *contretemps*.

He knew it would take tact — diplomacy of the finest kind. If the worst came, he'd buy her of her father and ship her north on an English boat to Morrison. He preferred to send her to Captain Haywood, but his whereabouts were constantly changing. As for Longworthy, the girl would be stolen e'er she got up the Niger to his station. Wallace? It would be a joke on the old coaster — but cruelty to the girl. If Wallace received her — which was not likely — his present wife might poison her. Morrison would welcome her; the Captain of the steamer would deliver her safely into his

hands and Morrison could dispose of her to his advantage.

But Huntingdon bothered himself for naught. At Cape Lopez the girl disappeared for over a week. Huntingdon finally saw her with Makàya. Makàya's charms had won her.

Huntingdon was so relieved that he dashed every one of his hands an extra supply of rum and tobacco.

But his troubles with women were just beginning.

Daily he was pestered. It was known that Makàya had Chief Ragundo's daughter. It was gossip that the white man had given her to the *Loango* out of appreciation for the latter's fine cooking!

Again, the women brought by different chiefs were of all types: the immature, the budding, the full-blown. Their complexions blended from the soft *cafe au lait* of the half-caste, to the rich ebony of the negro.

Their prices varied from \$3.00 to \$5.00 a month each, to be paid to their owners, with food and scant raiment for the woman.

The half-caste had been wife to a score of white men, either dead, or returned to Europe. She prided herself on it, and she was universally envied by the other women.

Disgust prompted Huntingdon to throw chiefs and the women out. But he remembered Smithson's advice.

He affected dissatisfaction.

The result was that he was continually importuned. But he was so liberal with gifts, that chiefs and women went away pleased. They saw only the gifts.

"You're new, Monsieur Huntingdon," shrugged Le-Blanc, the French trader. "Wait until you're out

longer, until Africa gets you, you won't be so finicky. You'll do as we do, not only hire the woman, but hire a guard to keep her from sneaking away with your cook, or *houseboy*, or her husband or owner. These women are not to blame for what they are. They know no better. They are *unmoral*, not *immoral*. They are merchandise to be realized upon. The natives have no domestic animals, lands or other sources of revenue. They have only their women. The men buy as many wives as they can. They desire children — females. In many parts of the country childless women are put to death. A girl is sold in marriage almost at her birth. When she grows to maturity, she is let out, just as one hires out any sort of servant — or animal. A woman daren't take a lover of her own choosing and give herself to him. Discovery means severe punishment to herself, and mutilation, perhaps death, to her paramour. Woman is always for sale, never given away. A native will give away everything he possesses, except his women. Princesses and slaves are in the same boat: a source of revenue to their owners."

"Queer customs these beggars have," commented Huntingdon.

"As for a white man," continued LeBlanc, "no matter how low in the social scale he may be in civilization, here, in Africa, he is a superior being. To be his mistress, brings everlasting fame to a black woman. They trade on it. What is a chief's first remark when he brings forth his women? '*She be all right. She savvy white man palaver. She was wife to So-and-so and So-and-so. She never born'd pickins — she savvy white man palaver, plenty plenty.*' "

Huntingdon fidgeted impatiently.

“What’s the matter with *you*?” cried the Frenchman, keenly alive to Huntingdon’s disgust. “I’m only telling you the custom of the country. I’m not responsible for it. Nor did I fight against it, as you are doing. I accepted it. I’ve bought every black woman who took my fancy — save one — and she’s not for me. She’s Ndio, the *Gabonaise*, mistress to the *Commandant*. You’ve seen her?”

Huntingdon shook his head. All native women looked alike to him. He saw no beauty, attraction in any of them.

“The *Gabonaise*,” went on the Frenchman, growing more heated as he proceeded, “is as superior to the *Ouroongo* women as Venus is to a vegetable vender. *Mon Dieu!* just to look at her is enough to send your blood through the top of your head. A more regal, savage, seductive creature was never conceived. She’s not an hour over sixteen, as supple as a tigress, as warm-blooded as Venus-Aphrodite herself. In her, all the elemental passions run riot. She knows no law save that of her emotions. Sex calls to sex the moment she and man meet. Man can no more withstand her than the blossom will creep away from the sunlight. She is beautiful, *magnifique!* The one woman for whom I suffer, the only woman I cannot buy!”

Again, Huntingdon’s disgust was so marked, that the Frenchman cried furiously:

“Look down upon and draw away from us white men all you will, M’sieu Huntingdon, the black woman will get you as sure as I, LeBlanc, the Frenchman, am talking to you! You’re in Africa and Africa makes shuttle-

cocks of white men! You'll go down and when you do, remember LeBlanc!"

LeBlanc's revelations increased Huntingdon's disgust. It was bad enough for a white man to cohabit with a black woman, but to wade deeper into the quagmire by placing a guard over her that she might not run away to a man of her own race, was the lowest depths of degradation. Huntingdon swore it would never come to him.

October brought the rains, increased heat and hordes of mosquitoes and other pests. Huntingdon's appetite decreased and he did not sleep well at night. He sought the *Douane* and each helped the other to endure and forget.

CHAPTER XVI

'TWAS the week before Christmas.

Huntingdon surveyed the changes in his bungalow with the keen interest and delight of a *connoisseur*.

The living-room was transformed into a great hall, after the manner of feudal England.

Everything in it was massive, befitting the country that gave them birth.

The old cross-beamed ceiling and rough plank floor remained. Around the walls ran a rough, broad shelf of ebony, on which were specimens of African handi-crafts: carved pipes of various kinds and sizes; calabashes; hammered brasses; canoe-shovels; paddles; miniature canoes; all sorts of animals done in ivory and ebony; ivory and ebony hair ornaments, bracelets and anklets.

There were also *ju-ju* charms; *tam-tams*, little and big; knives of grotesque designs; powder horns; boxes of bark; elephants' tails; hippopotami teeth; leopards' claws; birds' nests; vines interwoven in bizarre forms; blown crocodile eggs; skins of snakes, and a host of other interesting things.

Some of the idols were tiny, others large. Some were ebony, others of reddish mahogany; still others were soft wood smeared with red and white clay. Their features and headdress were that of Egypt. So far as Huntingdon was able to learn, the *Ouroungoes* did not

worship idols, and he recalled Smithson's statement that the only religion they had was that of superstitious, degrading fear, and that their only priest was the *Nganga*, or witch doctor, an all-powerful creature, tyrannous and overbearing and universally feared and bribed.

An immense fireplace and a chimney of ebony extended to the ceiling.

The andirons were great lions, on whose backs rested massive, oaken logs.

The furniture was of roseate mahogany, highly polished and exquisitely carved in bold, typical designs.

The oblong dining table consisted of two immense logs upheld by a number of lions.

At either end was a chair carved from one piece of wood, representing a gorilla on his haunches, his arms outspread.

The settle along either side of the table was also upheld by lions, and its back-rest was a broad rail carved in centipedes, scorpions, frogs and crocodiles.

The sideboard and buffet took up one entire side of the room. The doors underneath were carved with jungle scenes, and the plain, massive polished top made a striking background for the exquisite things upon it: drinking cups of horn, ivory, and ebony; a punch bowl of carved ebony, with handles and feet of unpolished ivory; peg glasses of ivory inlaid with ebony; a cork-screw set in an enormous hippopotamus tooth; a great salad spoon and fork of crudely carved ebony; and a grotesque ebony idol smeared with red clay.

Carved from one piece of ebony was the kneeling figure of a *bushwoman*, in all the grace of young womanhood. Her upraised arms supported a tray on her

head and on it were a Turkish coffee service, a *nargileh*, Turkish tobacco and cigarettes.

In contrast to the heavy ebony coffee table and its appointments, was a delicately carved teak-wood *tabouret*, with a tea service of frail Japanese china; a brass kettle and an alcohol lamp; dainty, exquisitely carved Japanese pipes with tiny, silver-lined bowls; a carved, brass Japanese ash bowl, and a dainty ivory idol. In them was read all the refinement of old Japan, juxtaposed with the crude savagery and primitiveness of the equator.

The old lounge was replaced by a broad divan of bamboo, with pillows of native cotton in slips of dull-gold pineapple cloth, and a magnificent leopard skin lined with soft, rich, orange Morocco leather.

The huge spine of a sword fish was mounted on ebony and utilized for a helmet rack, while a unique gong was made of an exploded brass torpedo shell suspended by a thong of leopard's hide from the crossed points of two unpolished ivories seven feet tall. Their deep, creamy tint contrasted effectively with the brass bell, the clapper of which was a very odd native knife with an ivory handle.

The walls were hung with trophies of the chase, mounted on rough blocks of ebony.

Two grinning skulls were side by side; a negro's and a gorilla's. It was difficult to tell them apart.

From the ceiling beams and supported by invisible wires to give them the appearance of flying and of life were white ibis, storks and cranes; pink flamingoes; gray parrots with red tails; gorgeous, vain peacocks; a great blue plantain-eater, and an enormous eagle, the leopard of the air.

The *tout-ensemble* was not set and conventional as in a museum or other show place; it spoke of intimacy, as though it were on congenial terms with its master, and so it was, for Huntingdon loved the room and wrote minutely about it to Marjorie and his mother.

One would have thought that this magnificent chamber would have appealed to the savages. But strange to say, it did not. The savages were more impressed with the fathoms and fathoms of unbleached muslin covering the walls and ceilings of the sleeping-rooms. Wood could be gathered in the forests, animals hunted in the jungles, and furniture carved and made by native carpenters under the supervision of the mission, but fathoms of trade cloth so wantonly covering walls and ceilings represented untold wealth to the simple minds of the savages. And again they averred that the Great White King owned all the wealth of the world!

The side verandas, too, had undergone a great change. Each was divided into two compartments. The rear one was the smaller and in it was a shower bath.

The shower was a great rubber bag operated by a pulley, and the tub was the ordinary zinc oval in general use by the traders.

The other compartment was fitted up as a rest- and reading-room.

Huntingdon's was of course the more complete of the two.

The furniture, a divan and several low, easy chairs, were imported from Madeira and were wicker. A low *tabouret* was of carved African teak. Shelves con-

tained reading matter of all descriptions, and there were desks of ebony fitted with writing materials.

Although no guests other than little Sadler had yet come to Huntingdon, he kept open house and he would have welcomed any white man who emerged from the bush. But no Englishmen were voyaging at that time of the year, and if there were any French or other nationalities *en route*, they sought the bungalows of their compatriots.

Christmas day the *Nigeria* was expected.

At Sierra Leone on the way out, a cable reached Skipper Hains, inviting him and his officers to the feast which was to celebrate the completion of the changes in Huntingdon's bungalow.

Sadler was to come down from the Ogôwe; Moore and the *Douane* were invited.

The little dry season was on. Ogula, the shootman, and Nkömbi Kakhi, his brother, had bagged game galore. Besides there were a *manatee-manga* weighing over five hundred pounds; an immense turtle and the biggest oysters Huntingdon ever looked upon.

Sunup Christmas morning found Ogula and Nkömbi Kakhi roasting game.

No white man's feast ever before created such a *furore*. From all directions the natives came. The beach was noisy with canoes, laden with gifts for the white man. Most of them were worthless and insignificant. But every gift was received in the proper manner by the officious Ngumbè dressed in new white ducks, and presents of tobacco, salt, matches, clay pipes, beads and mirrors were given in exchange.

The eyes of the savages glowed big with such munificence. Again and again comment was made on the vast wealth of their *Mpolo Tata Otangani*.

In the early morning the little *Oka* hove into sight. She crossed the bay at a high rate of speed.

Through his glasses Huntingdon discovered Sadler, standing at the wheel, laughing with the native pilot.

Huntingdon was at the beach to meet him. Both men were in immaculate whites.

“Merry Christmas,” called Huntingdon over the water.

“Aye! Merry Christmas,” came back Sadler’s hearty response.

“Aye,” answered Huntingdon, leaping to the *Oka’s* deck and wringing little Sadler’s hands.

With his characteristic boyishness, Sadler yelled:

“Sunlight, give them great White King the *dash* I bring um.”

Sunlight staggered under the weight of an immense tusk of ivory, exquisitely carved from end to end in centipedes, scorpions, birds and beasts.

“If you thank me for the bally thing, Huntingdon, I’ll take it back,” Sadler shouted, e’er Huntingdon could speak.

Huntingdon pressed the little fellow’s hand, hard.

“Git the hell out o’ here with it,” yelled Sadler, pushing the giant Sunlight down the gangplank.

Moore came swaggering along, dressed also in white, and swinging a cane.

Sadler sniffed at his approach. The trade perfume was unmistakable. But Sadler made no comment; he clasped Moore’s hand as though they were the best of

friends meeting after a long parting, and said: "Merry Christmas, Moore."

"Aye, the same to you and Huntingdon."

"Aye," responded Huntingdon, "Merry Christmas and many of them."

Moore and Sadler looked over the bungalow. They merely glanced into the bedrooms and the transformed verandas; their joy was expended on the great center room.

And it was magnificent to look upon. The day was clear and beautiful. Not a cloud was in the heavens and the sunlight showed up every nook and corner of the room and every piece of its unique and appropriate furnishing.

The spinal bone of the sword fish attracted Sadler. Moore expressed loud admiration for the drinking cups and punch bowl and vowed he would have duplicates made.

"Indeed," cried little Sadler, "it's nobody's outfit I'll be a-copying. I'll come down and enjoy King Huntingdon's when I can sneak off — can't I, King?"

Huntingdon smiled affectionately.

"You are always welcome to what I've got — so are you, Moore. We're Englishmen, we're aliens — that's enough."

Moore had the good grace to thank him. Sadler said nothing but commenced to whistle:

"*Do you love me, Mollie Darling?*"

The song took Huntingdon to England. Letters would be on the *Nigeria* — letters from Marjorie and his mother. Gifts, too, but gifts were secondary to letters!

“ Sadler was striking the torpedo gong, and its melodious notes were dying away when Ngumbè cried:

“ Master, *Nigeria* live!”

The *Nigeria* had scarce cast anchor when the three English exiles were up one of her ladders.

“ Oh, ho, me lads, you’ve come for your Christmas gifts. Well, I’m sorry for ye. They’re entrusted to the French government and it’s at the post office ye’ll have to get them.”

Skipper Hains was in fresh white, brown and healthy and active.

His little blue eyes didn’t appear to see anything, but nothing missed them. Anxiously he had watched Huntingdon climb the ship’s side. He wondered what he’d read in the lad’s face. The old truth and candor were there, if the color was missing. But he was fit, unusually fit for Africa.

Hains ordered champagne with a high hand — and with plenty of ice, too.

“ Ah, me lads, here’s to us all — together once again and to-day’s Christmas. Divvil a bit ye’d ken it was Christmas didn’t the calendar tell us so. It’s cold and snows and mistletoe —” he began, but suddenly he changed his tactics. “ And it’s well ye’re all looking. Ah, ye can’t beat the British — ner the Irish. We keep our feast days no matter where we be nor what divvils threaten us.”

He managed to draw Sadler aside.

“ Me lad,” he whispered, “ what time’s the feast?”

“ Indeed, I don’t know, Skipper!”

“ Hould yer toush now, but be after soundin’ Mr. Huntingdon’s boy.”

"If it's about grub, Skipper, save your *chef*. Huntingdon's got a barbecue on big enough to feed a whole army of fasting blue jackets."

"Has he now? Well, be a good lad and run along and find out the hour for the feast."

"One o'clock," Sadler reported in a little while, after having secretly consulted Ngumbè, who attended his master.

"I hear it's a foine mansion ye buildest out here, Mr. Huntingdon," said Skipper Hains. His tones were noticeably Irish. They were always so when he was happiest.

"Yes, I've been fixing up a bit — making myself comfortable — two years and a half more to put in, you know. Might as well get the best there is."

"Ye're right, me lad, and it keeps you —" he was going to say "out of mischief," instead he added, "from thinking about the time ahead of ye yet to be served. Yes, I heard about the grandeur of your place away north in Sierra Leone."

"Yes?"

"It's the gossip of the country" — and so are you the skipper might have added, but he didn't. "Well, come on, thin, show me this grand place. It's improvements I love to look at. Arrah, we had a divvil of a voyage out. Stiffest crowd ye ever knew. Governors and lords and creatures like that done up in rigimintals and spurs." There was no mistaking the contempt in the skipper's tones. "Ah, here are me officers now. All hands bound for John Holt's descend to the surf boats! And, Sampson, be after 'tinding to all me commands," and in the *Kru's* ear he whispered: "Tell the

Chief Steward to have everything at Mr. Huntingdon's by high noon, savvy?"

"I savvy, Captain."

The skipper's keen eyes took in every detail of Huntingdon's transformed bungalow. His greatest delight was that it contained no hint of woman.

Gifts and letters were many for Huntingdon. Old Wallace, Haywood, Longworthy and Cartwright wrote. With the exception of fever, all were as well as could be expected.

Neither Sadler nor Moore received any gifts from civilization, but Huntingdon had something for all of his guests: *nargilehs*, Turkish tobacco, and cigarettes and jars of candied ginger.

"Is it a gurrl ye think Oi am," demanded Skipper Hains, as he placed the ginger by for safe keeping. "Ah, thin, it's a confession Oi'll be after making: it's a swate tooth Oi have in me ould head and more'n wan av thim."

His brogue denoted the skipper's happiness, but none of the other white men appeared to notice it.

Moore's gift to Huntingdon was an ancient staff of ebony carved with crocodiles, snakes, bats and butterflies.

Attended by an armed *Senegalese tirailleur* and a *smallboy*, the *Douane* came, in spotless white and hung with medals.

The *créole* was *débonnaire* and graceful, despite the soft fat on his bones.

Hains had no liking for dark-skinned foreigners, all of whom he dubbed *half-breeds*. He loved the French least of all; his Irish honesty and candor could not tolerate their surface politeness and inward treachery.

Douanes he knew only as *skunks* who pounced on every parcel of importation for the bit of commission in it. They were some of the *scorpions* of the coast he avoided assiduously.

But Skipper Hains was just. In the *Douane* he recognized a gentleman: a proper companion for his beloved Huntingdon.

The *Douane's* gift to Huntingdon was a very old native knife. The wooden handle was roughly carved to imitate a snake, and from its open mouth the blade protruded. It was two-edged and shaped like a scythe.

Besides the food provided by Huntingdon, the skipper's gifts were two convashack ducks; a guinea pig stuffed with apples and chestnuts; Yorkshire pudding; Teneriffe wine; French champagne, and a cask of English ale.

From Lady Huntingdon and Marjorie came plum pudding, nuts and sweets, and pretty trifles made by them. The latter Huntingdon carefully packed away; they had no place in that rough environment.

The feast lasted from one o'clock until seven.

Healths were drunk to everybody: to England; to the King and the Queen; to mothers and sweethearts, sisters and brothers!

Oh, there was a hilarious time! Hilarious, because silence might creep in, and tears might flow, and tears would never do at a Christmas feast; oh, no!

“Mr. Skipper Hains,” cried Huntingdon, “you’ve forgotten something.”

“And have I now?” questioned the skipper.

“Mistletoe, English mistletoe,” spoke up Sadler. “That’s what he forgot, isn’t it, Huntingdon?”

Before Huntingdon had time to answer, the skipper remarked:

“If it’s your eyes ye’d be using more and less your tongues, ye might be after seeing somewhat.”

The skipper’s eyes were deep in an ebony tankard of ale. But Huntingdon discovered the mistletoe with its wavin blooms hanging from the long beak of a crane suspended low from the ceiling right over the table.

Huntingdon couldn’t speak. ’Twas the first Christmas he had ever spent away from home. They were missing him there, too —

The skipper’s tones were unusually blustering as he bellowed:

“And don’t be a-thankin’ me. It’s the Lady Marjorie that did it. Ye’ve been telling things on me to her, Mr. Huntingdon, and she’s been a-writing to me, and she came all the way to Liverpool, and the Earl, her father. Sez she to me — arrah, me lad, but she has the bonny brown eyes, and the red, kissing lips, and the beauteous red hair — red and a-rippling and astray like the Irish colleens — only she’s not got the freckles. Thinks me’sel when she looked up into me sea-dimmed eyes with her shining bright ones, my, thinks Oi, if there was only a freckle, just one on the end of your pretty, saucy nose, arrah, what was it, lad, Oi set out to say? Oh, yes. Sez she: ‘Captain Hains —’ — Oi say, Mr. Huntingdon, I’m after thinking that thim mermaids that hypnotized Ulysses, ye savvy the skipper ye told me of on your way out, who went a-sailing over strange seas after getting loose from hell,— thim mermaids’ voices must have been something loike the Lady Marjorie’s — Arrah, it’s crazy Oi’m going from the heat —

for to the end of me yarn Oi'll nivir come. Sez the Lady Marjorie to me: 'Captain Hains'— and nivir will Oi forget that voice nor the lovelight in her eyes— sez she: 'Captain Hains, Oi know Oi can trust this package to His Majesty's Mails as Oi've trusted manny's a token before now, but here's a parcel Oi'd like ye to deliver with your own hands to— to—'— what the divvil it was she called ye — not the Honorable, nor the Mister — ah, yes, 'twas Cecil — and the way she said it, arrah — it's forgetting Oi am what the lady said, but sez she: 'After Cecil's opened his gifts sent in charge of his Majesty's mails, Oi'd like ye to do me the favor to open this parcel. The mistletoe, please, hang over his table; put it in the mouth of one of those white birds he wrote about — as if the bird was after flying from me to him, and this, you're to lay this in his hand'— now what the divvil was it she said —," the skipper stopped abruptly and from his pocket he pulled — a sprig of rosemary and laid it in Huntingdon's hand.

"Arrah, arrah, an' what was it the Lady said," the skipper stopped again, affecting to be puzzled and filling up the gap to let Huntingdon get his feelings under control. "Ah, I've got it — it's befuddled me brain is from this damned nigger heat," and the skipper's words were never broader nor more Irish as he ended lightly, yet seriously: "Sez the Lady Marjorie to me: 'It's rosemary, and it's for remembrance.' Ye bull-headed, Capstan," he suddenly shouted at little Sadler, "how's the sailing? Crocs, yes?"

"And river horses," answered Sadler, trying his best to keep back tears.

"Ain't ye got a blunderbuss or a Brown-bess handy, or can't ye use one? I say, Moore, how's the ladies?"

Moore was also looking down his nose, but such a question never failed to arouse him.

"That's my affair," he bridled, but little Sadler commenced to sing:

My Bonnie lies over the ocean,
My Bonnie lies over the sea,
My Bonnie lies over the ocean,
Oh, bring back my Bonnie to me.

The others joined in, and the rafters fairly rang with the chorus to the delight of the servants and passing natives.

The black heads peering in at the door reminded the skipper of something.

"Mr. Mellon," Skipper Hains cried, addressing his first officer. "Ye saw to the rum and the tobacco for the *boys*."

"Aye, aye, captain. They're stowed away in Mr. Huntingdon's bedroom for safe keeping."

"Two hands for'ard," roared the skipper.

Ogula and Nkömbi Kakhi stepped briskly into the room.

"Show 'em where the stuff lies, Mr. Mellon, and let them be off wit' it. Ye won't be needing them again the day, Mr. Huntingdon?"

"All can go, save Ngumbè and Mbèga," Huntingdon answered.

After the plum pudding, blazing with rum, coffee and cigars were served, Sadler said:

"I'll be *boy* from now on, Huntingdon! Nothing to do but serve up wet drinks. Let Ngumbè and Mbèga

go with the rest of the gang. Christmas like this comes only once in a lifetime with these beggars. Let 'em eat and drink until they get the bellyache."

Thus midst raillery and mockery and devil-may-careity and pathos and a tacit shunning of reminiscences the Christmas feast was enjoyed.

"Oi say, Mr. Huntingdon," cried Skipper Hains, "where's that game of bridge Oi've been after promising me'sel? It's not a dacent game Oi've had since ye voyaged out wit' me."

Two tables were arranged, the winning partners changing after each rubber. After a time, the others tired and dropped out leaving the *Douane*, Huntingdon, Dr. Young and Hains, four matched players.

Play had been for a halfpenny the point, and gains and losses on either side had been small.

Young proposed twopence the point, and the others agreed.

It was decided to play pivot.

They cut.

Hains was pivot. Partners were to change after each rubber.

The scores were high. No trumper and royal spades predominated.

Then an interesting hand was played.

The *Douane* was dealing; Hains was his partner and dummy.

The *Douane* bridged it.

Hains declared:

"No trump!"

Huntingdon promptly doubled. He was to the left of the *Douane* and it was his first play.

Hains redoubled.

Huntingdon came back.

Hains was satisfied.

To the surprise of all, the *Douane* redoubled.

Huntingdon was content.

Hains rapidly computed:

“ 12, 24, 48, 96, 192 times tuppence makes 65s. 6d.
a trick for the winner. Capstans and halyards! Now
me noble partner, play as though the divvil had us both
by the heels awaiting to clean us out. It’s a fine hand
I have for ye, except two suits, and if ye can control
them, being’s ye doubled when the palaver seemed
set, then extra fizz water for all hands round and the
winnings to ourselves. Go on, Mr. Huntingdon, lead,
and may the divvil take ye.”

Huntingdon lead a small club, proclaiming his suit
to be clubs.

The skipper laid down his hand.

There wasn’t one club! There were three diamonds,
queen high; seven spades, ace, then jack; and of
hearts, ace, king and ten.

’Twas really a royal spade hand, but the skipper was
a sport and he had faith in the *Douane*.

“ If ye can get them spades a-working, partner,” he
said, “ then we’re good for the odd. If we can’t we pay
the damage. Cast off!”

That was the last word spoken during the hand.

On Huntingdon’s lead of the four of clubs, the
Douane discarded a diamond from the dummy.

Dr. Young, Huntingdon’s partner, played the ace of
clubs and the *Douane* played the three.

Dr. Young came back with the five of clubs.

The *Douane's* play was eagerly awaited. Everybody knew clubs were Huntingdon's suit and he likely held the king.

The *Douane's* movements were always slow, but now languor seemed to envelop him completely.

He laid down his cards and begged permission to light a cigarette.

He puffed at it slowly, one, two, three times!

The Englishmen were on nettles, the skipper particularly so. He couldn't mask his impatience. He stood up, stretched himself, then sat down again.

Languidly, the *Douane* resumed his cards, and his white jeweled hand laid down — the king of clubs.

Of course he would lead a spade — so the others thought.

Instead he lead — the ace of diamonds, and from the dummy he followed suit with the seven of diamonds.

He would surely lead a spade now.

He didn't. He laid down a small heart.

Huntingdon covered it with the seven spot.

The others expected the *Douane* to come in with the ace or king from the dummy.

Again the *Douane* was provokingly slow. Again he puffed at his cigarette. Hains' feet were twitching nervously, Young was noticeably agitated, and Huntingdon's brows were drawn.

Then slowly, slowly from the dummy, the *Douane* pulled out — *the ten of hearts!*

Dr. Young played the eight. It was the highest one he had!



'Twas the dummy's lead.

The *Douane* played more briskly now.

He pulled out the ace of hearts and from his own hand discarded a diamond, proclaiming that the heart he lead was the only one he had.

From the dummy he next lead the king of hearts. Huntingdon's only hope now lay in his partner's having the king of spades guarded and coming back with a club or a diamond.

Again it was the dummy's lead, and there was nothing left but spades.

Huntingdon bent over the table.

The skipper's little blue eyes were almost masked by their lids as though he were gazing into thick space.

Dr. Young pushed his cards closer, his eyes on the dummy.

The skipper and Huntingdon were in suspense to see Young's play, and Young to see Huntingdon's. The latter must have doubled on something worth while. As he didn't have aces he must have guarded kings and queens. Young was confident Huntingdon had the king of spades, and the skipper and Huntingdon were confident that Young held it.

Slowly from the dummy the *Douane* pulled the ace of spades. Dr. Young played a spot; so did the *Douane* and Huntingdon.

Again the *Douane* was compelled to lead from the dummy.

He led the eight of spades.

Now was the critical moment.

The silence was tense.

It was Dr. Young who seemed slow.

He played the queen, the only one he had left; his suit was diamonds. The *Douane* covered it with the king; Huntingdon discarded a diamond. Then the *Douane* lead a spade; jack, dummy took it, and the remaining dummy spade was good.

“A baby slam,” shouted the Skipper leaning over and ringing the *Douane*’s hand. “It’s a Ginaler and an Irishman ye ought to be, instid of —” he caught himself in time—he was going to say *half-breed*. “Arrah, let’s see now how much we’re to the good. 6 tricks. Six times 192 for each trick equals 1152. Add 30 for aces and 12 for the baby slam makes 1194 @ tuppence. Whew! 4776d or 398s, or £19 18s, for each of us, *Monsieur Douane*. If the Irish had such luck, they’d be owning England and free-ruling themselves!”

Bridge was Skipper Hains’ ruling passion and he loved no one so much as a good player. He forgot that the *Douane* was one of the *coast skunks* whom he so cordially hated and for the first time in his life, he pressed a *half-breed*, a detested Frenchman to dine with him aboard the *Nigeria* on her next voyage. The pleasure could not be his now, because the *Nigeria* was to steam away with the dawn.

But the *Douane* sincerely regretted his inability to accept the invitation. In two months his term expired and he expected to at once return to Martinique.

“In the name of chance, what did you double and redouble on, Mr. Huntingdon?” cried Dr. Young.

“I had seven clubs up to the queen; king, queen, and jack of diamonds; the queen and tray of hearts. One spade. ’Twas my lead. I played you for something. I thought it was easy sailing when you took my first

trick with the ace of clubs and came back with a spot, but the *Douane* and not you held the king. Who ever dreamed that you wouldn't hold an ace, the dummy would have no club, and my clubs and diamond suits would be killed right off the reel. I say, *Monsieur le Douane*, why did you play your ten instead of your king or ace of hearts?"

"You doubled," answered the *Douane*, "and I reasoned if my ten went through, we would make a little slam. The stakes were high and worth going for."

"Ah, gwan, quit holding post mortems," roared Skipper Hains. "Whew! That's the most excitement I've had in a long run, and 'tis the best hand I've seen played in some time. I'll set up the fizz water just for the excitement and pleasure it's been to me."

"Oh, no, Skipper," remonstrated Huntingdon. "Fizz water's on me — you're a winner."

"More reason for me setting it up. Annyhow, it's extra pleasure ye'd be giving me ould Irish heart. It's midnight, time to turn in, and ye wouldn't want to be a spoilin' the fine day I've had, would ye now, me lad?"

There was no resisting the skipper's Irish reasoning. He set up the wine.

At daybreak, the *Nigeria* steamed away.

New Year's day, the *Douane* entertained. Every white man in Cape Lopez was invited and made merry.

It was another divine day, just as Christmas had been.

The two months' and a half of rain seemed to have washed Africa clean of her stains and menaces.

The bush was beautiful in luxurious growth and coloring; the sands of the beach were packed hard; walking infinitely easier and very pleasant; the moist earth

slackened the sun's thirst; sea breezes tempered the heat; humidity was absent, breathing was a joy.

The temperamental white men responded to Nature's merry mood and good fellowship reigned. They parted in the best of spirits, each wishing the other good luck and health. Huntingdon hoped that such good fellowship would continue. Monotony would then lose its horror, and companionship, the beloved of exiles, would make life tolerable.

But Africa entices, only to torture the more.

The next day Cape Lopez was startled by the death of the *Douane* — from dysentery!

Sadler and Huntingdon were the only mourners. The other white men were again deep in Africa's clutch.

Again a grave on the wind-swept beach was dug and another white alien slept the sleep that knows no awakening; o'erhead the palms sighed mournfully, and on the beach the sea beat a monotonous tattoo.

Sadler returned to Lambarénè and Huntingdon was alone.

The next week brought the tornadoes. Rains lashed the earth; thunder reverberated through the heavens; lightning blasted and devastated; humidity like a wet blanket smothered all things and man's endurance was taxed to the utmost! Oh, how Huntingdon missed the *Douane*! There was no one to whom he could talk of Marjorie; no one to comfort and console him; no one to whom he could give his confidence. It was the greatest loss he had yet suffered; he brooded upon it; he cursed Africa and drank deeply.

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN the first week in March arrived and the rains still continued, Huntingdon was pretty well tired of his own society, of incessant work and lack of exercise. Great then was his joy when Ngumbè reported that Monsieur and Madame Léon, the missionaries whose coming had been gossiped about on Huntingdon's arrival at Cape Lopez, were settled at the *Rest House* for an indefinite stay.

Showing his contempt for gossip, Huntingdon preceded his call upon the missionaries by sending fresh meat killed by Ogula and some dainty edibles prepared by Makàya.

Accustomed to the smoothly shaven, immaculately clean High-Church prelates of Europe, Huntingdon was taken aback by the bearded, uncouth appearance of the young missionary. He wore a native-made khaki suit, the trousers of which were too short and the coat too small; he did in truth look like a scarecrow, as little Sadler had said.

But in Madame Léon Huntingdon found a charming woman, shy and retiring, with a *spirituelle* face and very sad, expressive brown eyes. It was quite apparent that she and her husband were both too young and of insufficient experience for missionary work in such a field as Africa. After the first discussion of religion, Hunting-

don avoided the subject. He and Léon were of diverse opinions, and Madame, of course, agreed with her husband.

Tea and biscuits were served, and a delightful, relaxing hour was passed.

Madame Léon was the first white woman with whom Huntingdon talked since he left Europe. She was a breath from civilization. Her presence would help him fight the desires of the flesh rising strong within him. For the first time in his life he recognized fully *all* a refined white woman means to a man!

He begged permission to call again.

Madame glanced timidly at her husband.

He was silent.

Traders and missionaries never came together save to clash: the latter to remonstrate against the corruption and theft of native women; the former to send the missionaries to hell and damnation for interfering with the white man's only diversion and pleasure.

"We are always at home, M'sieu Huntingdon," Léon finally said. "We shall be glad to receive you."

Huntingdon's pleasure was great.

He expressed his thanks, and kissed Madame's hand at parting.

The servants of the missionaries were young *boys* just beginning their training. Their cooking and other services were of the worst caliber; hence Huntingdon took keen joy in keeping the missionaries supplied with choice confections made by Makàya and game of all sorts killed by Ogula.

With the *Douane's* death Huntingdon's vegetables stopped. Now he longed for them for the gentle white

woman's sake, and he determined to have a garden of his own as soon as the rains ceased.

At first Huntingdon dropped in to tea only every other day; then he went every day. He looked eagerly forward to the four o'clock hour; it was a break in the deadly monotony; something to dress for. Tea and biscuits were daintily served; the conversation was varied and refined and Madame was a refreshing, civilized breath which robbed the present of its keenest torture.

Gradually Madame Léon lost her shyness. She was intelligent, well read and traveled. She had been a teacher of languages in Switzerland, and she spoke French, German and English but her husband spoke only French.

She told Huntingdon something of her duties at the little mission station in the bush beyond Lambarénè. Every morning and night there were church services; on week-day mornings church was followed by an hour spent in the hospital where the natives were treated for all sorts of ailments; then school followed. Hymnals, Bibles and books were printed in the native dialects; girls were taught such simple domestic science as was necessary to healthy, moral living; boys were taught tailoring, carpenter work and wood carving. Madame was the overseer of her own little household. Her servants were young mission boys.

"Wouldn't you find it easier to teach the women household work and wouldn't you rather have them about you?" Huntingdon asked.

"Strange to say, M'sieu Huntingdon," Madame replied, "the native girls are more stupid than the boys

about household matters, but the main reason for not having them as servants is because every one of them is a wife and her husband or owner will not trust her to work for the white man.” A flush overspread Madame’s pale face and Huntingdon, comprehending the reason for it, hastily asked:

“But you must find the life monotonous, the work tedious?”

“I would not mind it if the white men would let my girls alone. But they are always stealing them.”

She lowered her eyes to the lint she was cutting. But not quickly enough. Huntingdon sensed her existence: perpetual service, perpetual sameness, perpetual ingratitude! What a life for a young, sensitive, refined white woman!

Her place was in the light, the joy, the change of the world, with a mate of her own standing, not the inferior creature to whom the Church had tied her.

Sympathy for her welled strong in Huntingdon. He did his best to ease her lot. He kept her in reading matter and Makàya continued to concoct delicacies for her.

Huntingdon was anxious for Madame to see his living quarters, and after many invitations, Madame and her husband honored him with a call. Great indeed was his pleasure, and great were Madame’s surprise and delight at the beauty and comfort of his bungalow. Huntingdon offered to move out and give the missionaries possession, but they protested; they were inured to hardships; they did not expect luxuries and comfort in the service of the Lord; they were content as they were.

Huntingdon showed Madame Marjorie's picture, and told her of his betrothal.

Long and silently Madame studied the photograph, then, she said, plaintively :

“ A sweet face — and a noble one. Be true to her, go back and marry her, but never bring her out here ! ” It was the nearest regret to which she ever gave expression, and strange to relate it was made to a man other than her husband ! Huntingdon, the gentleman, the man of honor, understood, and this slight confidence and great understanding drew closer together those sensitive, impressionable exiles born of the same race and endowed with the same fine sensibilities.

Huntingdon was happier than he had been for many a day. He had the sympathetic companionship of a refined white woman ; no more would he be lonesome, and, to show his appreciation, unknown to Madame he had cases of delicate canned foods sent to Lambarénè to greet her on her return.

But, alas, pleasures never last — especially in Africa !

A few days later Huntingdon was taking his usual after-luncheon *siesta* on the veranda, invisible to out prying eyes.

Ngumbè and another native were conversing outside.

“ King Huntingdon be sweetheart to mission woman. That's why him never take native woman for wife ! ” said the strange native.

Huntingdon was horrified !

There was only one thing for him to do : give up his daily tea at the *Rest House*; give up his companionship with Madame !

And they meant so much to him! They were the only diversion in corroding monotony — the only relief from work, heat, moisture and insects!

But no matter what the cost to him, he could not have a white woman slandered!

He cursed the natives, and remembered Wallace's blasphemy at the ear-splitting gossip of the coast. The old coaster knew whereof he spoke.

Doubtless the tale first came from a white man: from Moore, or LeBlanc. They were both so determined that he would become as they. But he'd show them!

Aside from his promise to Marjorie, as was the way with the men of his race, attempt to force a thing upon them, and they would rather die than yield — even though that thing were for their best good!

When several days passed and Huntingdon failed to call at the *Rest House*, Monsieur Léon sent to inquire if he were ill?

No! He was usually busy with the mails for the next European steamer.

Again, that his incoming cargo was so large that he was busy checking it off.

Again, that he had the fever.

His heart smote him for the latter deception when a dainty *blanc-mange* and tiny sweetcakes came from Madame.

“ I made them myself,” she wrote. “ I hope you will enjoy them. We miss you and hope you will soon be well enough to come again, *as usual*.”

As usual! So she missed him too. For the first time in his life rage against his fellow man boiled within him;

murder was in his heart, and he consigned the white men of Cape Lopez to the lowest depths of blazing hell!

He took a great draught of absinthe, then, deliberately he passed the *Rest House* and called on Moore next door.

With Moore he sat on the veranda until long after nightfall drinking and laughing, when LeBlanc, Wildman, and the *Chef de Poste* came and drinking and gambling went on all night.

Madame was on the veranda when he passed in the morning.

He hoped she would not notice him.

She bowed gracefully. But she did not smile.

She was unusually pale and great rings were under her eyes.

Again Huntingdon cursed all men, himself included — then was glad that for a woman's sake he had the courage to be cruel!

But it was not done without great effort. He had to fight selfishness — he meant no harm to the woman — he wanted only her companionship, the pleasure of afternoon tea — the break in eternal sameness! Why shouldn't he enjoy them! She would never get to hear the gossip about her. If she did, hadn't she been ignominiously slandered before he had ever set eyes on her?

But the men of his race ever honored women and protected them. He beat down selfishness — and beat Ngumbè and Mbèga too. 'Twas the first time he ever laid violent hands on any human thing!

He was ashamed, too, but his passions must have some outlet!

The brake of self-control could not forever curb.

Shortly afterwards, the missionaries returned to Lamberné and from Monsieur Léon there came a stiff, yet polite note, thanking Huntingdon for the cases of goods he had sent, and expressing the hope that all was well with him.

CHAPTER XVIII

HUNTINGDON left John Holt's employ exactly one year and two weeks after entering it. The two weeks were given to breaking in his successor, a white man from Gaboon.

Huntingdon's new factory was the most modern and healthy in the country. It was of one story; well raised from the ground, with a cement floor, and plenty of windows and ventilation. The selling space in front was modern in every respect; the warehouse behind was spacious; special precautions were taken to protect merchandise from white ants, and a burglar alarm was connected with the new bungalow.

Both bungalow and factory were situated on the beach just north of John Holt's.

Goods were imported direct from Europe, and consisted only of those things which appealed directly to the natives. There were no hand sewing machines without needles; no jewelry that turned green at the first breath of the sea; no silk stockings for legs that never wore any sort of stockings; no junk scorned by the civilized and supposed to be good enough for the savage. Jewelry was of good plate; there were many different kinds of cloth, beads, mirrors, pomades, belts, knives, soaps, rum and other liquors, trade guns and powder, tobacco, crockery, enameled tins, parasols, umbrellas, straw hats, broad-rimmed felt hats, helmets, suits of

khaki and of white drill of graduated sizes, gaudy silk handkerchiefs, sardines, salt, rice and dried vegetables.

The bungalow was the result of years of experience and study on the part of the French fathers.

Floors were cement; walls and high ceilings were paneled with polished, roseate mahogany; windows were large with well-fitting shutters; verandas were deep and spacious and like the interior finished with mahogany and cement, and well screened and shuttered. The gallery was a sanitary, up-to-date, civilized kitchen, with an iron cook stove imported from Europe.

The plan of the bungalow was the same as Holt's: the living-room in the center, with the bedrooms leading off either side. The furniture occupied the same relative positions in the new bungalow as it did in the old. The bedrooms were roomy, cool and rest-inviting, while the great center room was more effective than ever, enhanced by the cement floor and the paneled walls and ceiling.

Huntingdon's home was complete and beautiful. He was as proud of it as though he were a bride.

Wallace, Longworthy, Haywood, Cartwright and Skipper Hains, with whom Huntingdon kept up a regular correspondence, cabled their congratulations; so did Lord and Lady Bedford, Marjorie, and a host of friends. John Holt especially wished his competitor good luck. He was sorry to lose Huntingdon, but from the beginning he knew Huntingdon's plans; then, too, it is a truism: that which we desire to keep, gets away; that which we would lose, hangs on.

The local traders were loud in their praise of the new factory and the bungalow. They railed against their

respective employers for compelling them to remain in unhealthy factories and bungalows. They agreed to send protests to home offices and demand better things — which they never did!

Sadler brought down all the English traders in the Ogôwe who could steal away for a few days.

The little fellow was happy because Huntingdon had emerged from servitude and was going it alone.

Huntingdon also rejoiced that the worst of his exile was over.

He was now his own master, free to trade how and where he listed.

In his factory were two innovations; he catered only to natives; he traded both for cash and products. Other factories traded for cash only over the counter and made a bid for the white man's trade.

Mbèga, impossible as a *houseboy*, became an efficient *shopboy*. He had learned rapidly from Itula.—To the latter's envy when Mbèga, not he, was given charge of the new factory.

Itula was sure he was going, but Huntingdon would not rob any person of a good servant. The other white men said that he was a fool for not helping himself to all he could get.

Mbèga had grown and developed wonderfully in the past year. He wore a well-fitting suit of khaki and threatened to surpass Ngumbè in style and appearance. He was very proud of the confidence reposed in him by the Great White King and he became a veritable watchdog for his master; Ogula, the shootman, was also attentive and faithful; and, while Ngumbè and Makàya continued to serve well, it was solely because

of their pride in working for such a famous master and for the good wages he paid.

From the beginning the better part of the trade of Cape Lopez was Huntingdon's. He did not undersell his competitors, nor did he offer any greater inducements to the natives. He did a clean-cut, straightforward business; his name was synonymous with square dealing.

But it took great patience!

Although the natives know well enough what their products are worth, haggling is a fine art with them, and time is their greatest asset. They never hurry, nor can they understand why the all-powerful white man should hurry. They go from factory to factory and generally end by trading at the first place visited by them.

Time sped, for it was the dry season.

Again the *Nigeria* and the *Dwarf* came. Skipper Hains continued to rejoice that no black woman appeared on Huntingdon's horizon and together he and Huntingdon longed for the *Nigeria*'s next call, when she would take away Huntingdon's first shipment of logs.

The *Dwarf* revived the hunt and lavish entertainments, in which Huntingdon again took the lead. The year in Hell's Playground did not seem to leave any mark on Huntingdon and Bouchard was glad to pay his bet. Everybody got proper drunk, Huntingdon included; again the fun was fast and furious—and Huntingdon remained until the end. He lived the same lives as the other white men, with one exception and that a great one: he persisted in his refusal to take a native wife. Hence many an hour he was left to himself and in his

own society he did not always find amusement. However, when October found Cape Lopez again settled down to its weary monotony, Huntingdon set out for the main Ogôwe to make a personal appeal for trade. He was amazed at the great wealth to be had simply for the plucking. He determined to exert every effort to obtain it; work would not only bring him surcease from the annihilating present, but it would bring Marjorie nearer. The more Africa combated him, the more determined was he to conquer.

For the first time he rejoiced in the fame that was his as the Great White King. He recognized the power it gave him over the natives. He used that power to its utmost capacity.

He was universally received with marked hospitality and rejoicing, and he was surprised at the number of natives who spoke English.

Old chiefs regaled him with tales about the first white traders who had come amongst them. Shriveled up old hags were proudly brought forth and exhibited either as their wives or daughters. Everywhere was good will shown him, and promises were made to send him great quantities of rubber, ivory, timber, etc.

The greatest honor possible was thrust upon him; he was asked to judge tribal palavers that had endured for years.

He patiently listened to both sides of the argument, and his decisions were warranted by the facts; sentiment played no part therein.

From restricted trade districts natives came in delegations and begged the Great White King to bring back the English, which was but another name for open trade.

At their request Huntingdon visited towns in the restricted districts, and he saw for himself the things complained of by Smithson and the natives.

Many towns were abandoned ; others had been so many times raided by the *Commandants* in search of *impôt* that they were but dust heaps of ruins and poverty. Trading posts, long regarded as fixtures and about which towns were built and plantations cultivated, were no more. Whole communities were scattered and destroyed. Great plains which for upwards of fifty years swarmed with life and the bustle of passing trade caravans, were silent and deserted ; ant-hills and arid grass and wind-swept paths were the only signs of life upon them.

Priceless timbers, rubber, and other valuable commodities were rotting in vast belts of the rich equatorial forests. No longer did heavily laden canoes pass to and fro upon the many rivers ; no longer did the song of the happy paddlers echo from shore to shore.

Towns of which they told tales of great trading done and of loves and hates outrivalling the most interesting fiction, were but a few ragged plantain trees, disconsolate and bowed to the earth as the very natives theniselves.

Old men and old women, once a power unto themselves, who lived before the first white man came amongst them and who later enjoyed the things he brought, united in one long wail against the destruction that had come upon them wrought by the greed of the French Government !

Everywhere the same cry was heard :

“ O Great White King, give us the English back before it is too late, too late ! Tell your country how the

French rob and crush us. What aliens we are in the lands of our fathers. No longer is there any freedom, any caste among us. Free men are reduced to states worse than that of wild beasts. Beasts have a lair in which they find safety. But sooner or later the French get us and we are imprisoned, degraded, because we have no products to market and no market in which to exchange them at an equitable price — e'en though we do harvest our own products for the *concessionaires!*"

The *concessionaires* complained to Huntingdon that the natives were but *lazy dogs* who would not gather rubber, nor cut timber, and who ought to be *chicotted* into submission!

The *concessionaires* forgot that for over one-half a century the *lazy dogs* were content with a bone — the biggest share is always the white man's. But, now, instead of the bones, the natives were expected to come forward and receive a kick for their pains! Savage though they were, they had intelligence enough to keep at a safe distance from the kick.

With derision they looked upon the ragged, insect-eaten tobacco sold them at an exorbitant price and spoke of the broad, clean, whole-leaved Virginia tobacco of open trade days. The narrow, thin, unwashable French cottons they disdained and pointed with pride to an old, yet still wearable, print of the British or the Germans.

The rice sold to them was but husks and dust; the rum the vile wood alcohol of commerce, more poisonous than any concoction brewed by themselves. Men and women and children went down under it daily.

Huntingdon knew that all colonization smells more or

less of freebootery, piracy, but where such methods defeat the purpose in view, why continue them? France outraged all the laws of hospitality. She destroyed where she ought to protect.

The news of the coming of a *Commandant* caused a general exodus to the bush, for in their respective districts *commandants* wield a one-man power, despotic beyond conception. If taxes were not forthcoming, men were tied up, women and children outraged, and every available thing carried away by the black soldiers who loved to pillage and destroy. For no tyranny so great as that practiced by one savage over another.

The enmity of the government and the traders also extended to the missions, for this reason: so dependent had the natives become upon the white man that their own industries were neglected; very, very little native cloth was woven; ironwork was almost a lost art; the natives never did grow tobacco, and the government forbade their making salt, although the broad Atlantic washes their shores. Hence, treated unjustly by government and traders, the natives flocked to the missions. Even the most superstitious and degraded of them had to seek the *men of God palaver*. They brought their products for exchange — whenever they could steal products from the concessions — they clamored for work. Prosperity came to the missions and their profits were not sent to Europe, but were used locally, for the development of mission plantations and schools and the betterment of the native.

The traders complained to the government that the missions had no license to engage in trade and the government must forbid them to do so! France heeded

the cry of the traders by issuing an order that *all trade must be for cash!* Another long-rooted custom uprooted at a stroke! From time out of mind exchange was the order of trade, and where were the natives to get cash? They not only had no products to market but no competitive market to trade in and they continued in their refusal to work for their oppressors. Consequently, missions had to close their factories to the natives, and the natives, not appreciating the position of the missions, classed them among their enemies. Undone in an instance was the good accomplished by the missions in the half century or more of their hard labor!

With tears in their eyes the good fathers at the Mission of *Sainte Anne* in the Fernand-Vaz complained of these things to Huntingdon, and in native towns, the natives themselves told him that missions also *make fight-palaver for black man!* The missions had no laborers to work their plantations, they could not grow sufficient foods to feed the mouths of the converts dependent upon them, they were handicapped and harassed on every side! Formerly the government paid them a yearly sum towards their work, but as the government grew poorer because of its own short-sighted acts, that stipend was withdrawn, and the missions thrown wholly on their own resources had not the wherewith to go on!

France boasts of *liberté, égalité et fraternité!* Bondage is by no means the most depressing condition in the world. Robbery, pillage and degradation and the doing away of old-established customs long enjoyed are far worse.

Under native laws many slaves were richer than their masters. They owned and accumulated property.

They were allowed to travel to different parts of the country, to cut timber, gather rubber, etc. But France treated free-born natives worse than the natives ever thought of treating their vilest slaves. They could not go from one district to another without the written consent of the *Commandant*!

Chiefs and other free men were no longer the heads of their own households and a power unto themselves. Many of them had no households at all. Their towns were looted; destroyed; sons, kinsmen, retainers succumbed to the intruder, or else had run away where the oppressor could not reach them.

The natives were forced to be beggars, drones, cowards, thieves. They were driven by the lash of the white man's cupidity. If they remained to argue, they were imprisoned for their impudence!

Daily the government and the natives grew farther apart.

Instead of ingratiating herself into the favor of the natives — as do all intruders who have a spark of policy about them — France continued to wave the red flag of oppression and further oppression. She cut off her own nose to spite her face, and wondered why the natives fled her ugly visage.

Huntingdon could not understand the policy of France. The natives were not appealing to the powers and demanding relief from French rule! They simply wanted open trade restored; a chance to work; to sell their products in a competitive market. It was a just demand, a natural one. Why then did not France heed it? The gewgaws of the white man were not necessary to the natives. If they were willing to work their

country and give their products in exchange for trade goods, then why not let them do so? especially when the result is the *raison d'être* of the white man's intrusion upon the black man!

To gather rubber is no easy task. It has cost millions of lives and it will continue to cost more annually as the difficulties in gathering it increase.

It grows in the depths of the almost impenetrable jungles, whose noxious effluvia is fatal to human existence.

With *matchettes*, Huntingdon's guides and servants forced a path through the labyrinth of climbing vines, gigantic shrubs, endless creepers and hosts of parasitical and other luxurious tropical growth which above, below and all about resented their intrusion.

Progress was slow; torturesome. Now up to the waist in slimy, thick vegetable mold; now clinging to stout vines to keep a balance; now thrown upon creeping, crawling, hateful feeling denizens of the undergrowth by the giving way of what appeared to be strong supports; now on all fours creeping cautiously along over decaying underbush and leaf mold; or crawling nervously and painfully along a fallen tree throttled and borne to the earth by the very vines it had succored and supported, the carriers struggled with loads on their heads and Huntingdon crawled after them!

No word was spoken. All energy was needed for locomotion, self-preservation.

Heat, heat, everywhere — the humid, suffocating heat of the exuding humors of the sick and dying vegetable kingdom — a weight on the human breast as though some nocturnal beast were sucking from the lungs the

little air stolen by them from the atmosphere of corruption all about. Wave after wave of fetid vapors engulfed Huntingdon; silently, stealthily, viciously, glutonously and all the more terrible because they had no shape and could not be guarded against. Hydraheaded monsters they were abroad in Nature's most riotous garden, where is fought the terrible, relentless, perpetual battle of the survival of the fittest, where out of the dissolution of millions are born the conquering thousands!

Finally, the *via dolorosa* lead into a rubber camp and *Hell* was at hand!

In that eternal gloom of pestiferous depths, shunned by all healthy things, little children, men and women in the flower of their youth, mothers with babes strapped to their backs, decrepit old men and old women, gathered the viscid matter called rubber! Their movements were listless and mechanical — they were as doomed souls serving an endless penance. Fever was in their eyes, rheumatism in their joints, the chill of malaria in their veins and their life forces oozed drop by drop in the sweat of exhaustion that bathed their almost nude bodies!

From its perch on its mother's back, a baby cried as the mother inadvertently thrust its tender eye against a jagged leaf!

A little girl, not more than four years old and innocent of drapery, tottered under the weight of a calabash filled with drinking water!

A woman, hollow-eyed and delicate, patiently lighted her master's pipe, then sank listlessly among the dank underbrush, to arise again when the pipe was handed her for replenishing and lighting. She was too far spent to do anything else!

In iron kettles on wood fires *manioc* was boiling. And in the embers green plantains were roasting.

About the fires, stretched on mats damp as the very earth itself, lay the exhausted, the sick, the dying! Three were already dead and two men were making rude litters to convey the deceased back to their native towns — perhaps a week's journey away.

New odors offended the already weakened nostrils. They outstenched even vegetation's mold, for decaying human flesh and the living sick body have smells distinctly their own.

In that reeking, deadly atmosphere a little girl was born but a few hours since! She lay on a mat, uncovered and unattended, while flies, ants, spiders and other crawling pests fed on her tender new flesh! The mother had again taken her place among the laborers. In piles lay the rubber — a dirty blue-white, roughly kneaded into small balls.

Huntingdon had not protested had the natives rushed upon and killed him for he was of the race that compelled their drudgery. But even as he closed his eyes, no longer able to look upon the uncanny tragedy, the natives were upon him, not with blows and curses but with smiles and hospitality's greetings!

From somewhere new grass mats were brought and a roughly carved ebony stool.

Children, at the first sight of the white man, shrieked in terror and hid behind their mothers, while over older faces, accustomed only to endurance's stony stare, came a slow smile, all the more pathetic because it was so short-lived!

It is this very rubber — rubber gathered at the ex-

pense of human suffering, human life,— that the white man decries as worthless, and to the gatherer gives a less reward than he tips a well-fed and well-clothed waiter who serves him for a brief moment of time! It is this very rubber — or the want of it — which must bear the brunt of all the sins of commission and omission of the French Government and on which is blamed the annihilating conditions existing to-day in the *Congo Français*.

Thief-palaver is what the natives term the action of the French.

Nothing for nothing is the dictum of righteousness. Nothing for nothing is the great law. Can any one set of people deny all right? The French rob the natives and continue to rob them. They are left nothing, *yet out of nothing they are expected to pay something!* As Smithson had said it is an impossible condition, and something must give way. “The native is crushed to the earth and never rises again.”

“France in her greed kills the goose that lays the golden eggs. She might find other geese, but who can resuscitate the dead ones?” Aye, Smithson knew whereof he spoke!

Huntingdon also recalled the argument between Captain Haywood, the soldier, and Longworthy, the man of trade.

“After all, who reaps the reward of Africa?” Haywood had demanded. “Why, the white man. Work is alien to the native. We force him to it, and none too gently, either. The fact that he works for us at all, that he permits us to remain in his country, ought at least to earn some consideration for him.”

Longworthy raged in reply: "If colonies were built on justice, there'd be no colonies," or words to that effect.

Those were Sadler's views too, when Huntingdon told him what he had learned throughout the bush.

"None of it's new to me," said the little skipper; "and don't imagine, Huntingdon, that you can change things one bit, out here. You can't. We British have been butted out in some districts and we got damages from the *Pomme-de-terre-frits*, but damages are nothing to our loss of trade. But take my advice, old man: get all you can out of the *niggers* and the *Pomme-de-terre-frits*. Their hoggish concessions are continuing to go to the wall and Smithson was right when he advised you to jump in and secure them."

"I'm doing my best, Sadler. I wrote home the next boat after Smithson gave me the tip and the next mail ought to bring me some definite news."

And it did. Huntingdon's agents in Paris had succeeded in getting control of French concessions at Mboué, Ninga Sika, and Agôuma.

French traders continued in charge of the factories, but Huntingdon himself visited them frequently and watched his own interests closely. As Smithson had predicted, natives came from all directions and, demanding work, were eager to serve the Great White King and bring him the products of their country. The old standard wages were restored; trade goods were the same prices as at the coast; native products recovered their standard values; barter and sale were as they had been before monopoly gripped the land. Universal was the demand for Virginia leaf tobacco; it was the greatest

medium of exchange and Huntingdon marveled why direct American trade had not come to the coast.

Experienced planters were sent out from Europe; every foot of Huntingdon's territory was put under cultivation, principally with rubber vines, lime trees, *cacao* and ground nuts. Native foods were also grown in profusion and the great vegetable garden at Ninga Sika was revived. This island had been first cultivated over a half century ago by one Lawler, a Yankee trader, and near it were the towns built and occupied by Paul du Chaillu. Any white man could have vegetables for the sending and many of them availed themselves of Huntingdon's generosity. Vegetables also found their way to Madame Léon at Lambarénè and to little Sadler. Moore and the other white men of Cape Lopez were also supplied.

As the business increased, native clerks were secured from the British Government at Sierra Leone, and for the first time in years the Fernand-Vaz, the Rembo and the Bakelai rivers resounded with their old-time activity. Again the happy song of the paddlers reverberated from shore to shore. Abandoned towns were again occupied. Native plantations were again made!

Huntingdon's first shipment of logs on the *Nigeria* was the largest that ever left Cape Lopez. Skipper Hains and Sadler rejoiced as much as did Huntingdon and the occasion was turned into a general festival. Again Huntingdon was lavish with gifts to the natives and in his entertainment of the white men.

Huntingdon was now the gossip of the entire west coast and the only truthful thing said of him by white

men were his ever increasing trade and his continued popularity with the natives. He was indeed their Great White King. He continued to judge their palavers ; he paid the taxes of the old and the infirm but able-bodied men were put to work and willingly and well they worked.

No hatred so deep and relentless as that of jealousy and envy. Had the gossip of the other white traders ever come to Huntingdon's ears, there had been murder at Cape Lopez, for the tales they spread about him were dastardly in the extreme.

Huntingdon, however, was sublimely unconscious of everything save the progress he was making and the flight of time.

Two years were numbered with the past and only one year of service remained.

But the struggle was telling on the white man. Africa besieged him in every possible manner. Daily the languor within him grew ; he was weary, so utterly weary !

More frequent were attacks of fever ; he crowded on more quinine.

He who had never before felt ache or pain became a hospital of ills ; movement was misery, to remain still was agony.

Tornadoes were again raging.

The days were monotonous ; the nights interminable.

The heat and the mosquitoes were maddening.

For the first time Huntingdon had to admit that Africa was what the sour-dough men had labeled her : *just plain hell.*

Monks of old flayed their flesh to kill desire.

Huntingdon dulled his by fatiguing walks through

almost impassable bush with Nkömbi Kakhi and Ogula, the shootman.

He sank deep in mire — sometimes to his very arm-pits.

Complete exhaustion earned him a few hours' unconsciousness during the interminable hours of the tropical night, but the curse of loneliness was upon him.

Little Sadler's first term of service had expired and he was in Europe for rest. How Huntingdon missed him! And the *Douane!* If thought and longing could recall the dead, then would have the *créole* come to his friend, but, alas, mortal mind might get some comfort in retrospection, but it cannot reincarnate those who have shed this mortal coil. The white men of Cape Lopez never called upon Huntingdon, save to borrow money with which to pay gambling debts, rental on native women and to make up shortages to their respective firms. Huntingdon never failed them. He who was suffering so keenly could put himself in the place of other sufferers and he could not be other than kind.

Huntingdon's mail, too, had gradually fallen off. Of the *compagnons de voyage* he heard only from Wallace, and the old coaster's letters depressed rather than cheered.

Huntingdon could not possibly have endured the life had it not been for his beloved and her letters. But not a word of his purgatory did he write to her. He spoke only of the passing of time and of business. The latter was slow now because of the heavy rains, but all signs indicated a very heavy shipment of logs and increased business in general the coming dry season.

In the midst of one interminable night, Huntingdon could have cried for very joy when Moore sent for him. Chills and fever were shaking the life out of Moore and at sight of Huntingdon, he immediately went off into delirium. Huntingdon not only tenderly nursed Moore but took complete charge of his factory, leaving Mbèga to look after his own. Moore acknowledged that he owed his life to Huntingdon, but Huntingdon made little of his services and assured Moore that he, Moore, would do as much for Huntingdon or any other white man who was in distress. For a few weeks following his recovery Moore sought Huntingdon continuously, then abruptly he absented himself and again Huntingdon was left to self and monotony.

April came.

Huntingdon had no desire for food. He slept only under the influence of opiates. He drank deeply, too. Daily, his only exercise was the short walk from bungalow to factory. Once in a while he managed to get as far as the post office.

It was endurance, stiff, determined endurance. He shut his jaws tight. He swore to endure — to the end. There was some life in the factory and he sought it. He let Mbèga go for the day; the *boy* had been faithful and had not had a holiday in a long while.

A man and a woman came to trade.

“ Lemme look them *stink* water,” the man demanded, indicating perfume in the show case.

He put the bottle to his nose and sniffed vigorously.

“ He be plenty strong, too much?”

“ Proper fine,” answered Huntingdon.

“ How much he be?”

“ *Foura mbani* — two francs.”

For five long minutes the man and woman discussed the price in their native tongue.

“ You no got one shilling bottle? ” asked the native.

Huntingdon brought forth another bottle from the case.

“ Him be plenty fine; strong, too much? ”

“ Proper fine,” answered Huntingdon, patiently.

“ How much he be? ”

“ One shilling.”

“ You no got him for *dee sous*? ”

“ One shilling,” answered Huntingdon, forcing himself to patience.

Again a consultation between the natives.

Finally the bottle was handed to the woman.

The man slowly untied a knot in a handkerchief, extracted a shilling, slowly retied the knot, and laid the money on the counter.

Then, after pricing nearly everything he saw, he grunted:

“ Knife.”

A jackknife of one blade was handed out.

Again long conversation, price asked, comments made.

Another fumbling with the kerchief and ten *sous* were laid down.

Again an inspection of the factory, a lot of questions asked, then cloth was demanded.

“ No got other for two *fouras*? ” asked the native, after several cloths were shown him.

“ Take um or lef’ um,” Huntingdon cried irritably.

It was the first time he had rebelled, but it didn’t affect the native in the least.

Again came the jabbering with his woman, again the process of extracting money from the kerchief, retying it, and handing the cloth to the woman.

“*Tacco*,” next demanded the man, but Huntingdon’s patience fled.

“No live,” he cried, shooing the man and woman off, fastening the door and hurrying to the bungalow.

He wanted to get away from sight or sound of natives.

He found Ngumbè and Makàya fighting over a woman.

Ngumbè had let out one of his wives to Makàya and Makàya had failed to pay the *ten sous* demanded.

As usual, they brought the palaver before the white man.

Heretofore Huntingdon had always listened patiently to palavers, let each participant have his say, then he rendered a just decision.

But to-day he was in no mood for anything, save to drop on a divan, to give up to the Vampire Languor who gnawed at his very vitals.

“Master,” Ngumbè was saying, “them *Loango* him tek my womans for him bed, me I lef’ um an’ he *dash* me *dee sous*. All time so — but now *Loango* say me, ‘Ngumbè, me no fit pay *dee sous*.’ *Loango* mek thief-palaver for Ngumbè. It no be so, Master?”

Infinitely bored and irritable, Huntingdon harshly demanded — he wanted to be rid of the whole business —

“What have you got to say, Makàya?”

“Me?” and Makàya came forward in his greasy glide. “Master look. I tek him womans, it be so. All time I pay Ngumbè *dee sous* — it be so. Now t’ree him womans born *pickens*. Them be my part. Womans

— that's what them *pickens* all be — they be all same *argent*. Ngumbè fit for sell 'im when *pickens* ketch proper big. Me, fadder for them *pickens*, bring *argent mpolo, magnifique* to Ngumbè. He be proper rich when him sell him *pickens* to mens. Me, I never owe him *argent*, him got proper *dee sous mpolo* in them *pickens*, it no be so, master?"

"Get out, both of you," cried Huntingdon. "Fight it out between you. I don't care a damn what you do. Get out of my sight. I'm sick of your eternal *mammy-palaver* and greediness!"

Great was the gossip among the white men at Huntingdon's action. It was reported far and wide. Oh, yes, Huntingdon, the great *Anglais* was going the way of Africa all right. 'Twould not be long now until he was thoroughly subjugated!

Several days later Chief Ragundo with a retinue came to Huntingdon with a palaver.

Again woman was the cause of the dispute.

It was hours before Huntingdon got the gist of the affair.

A native had stolen one of Chief Ragundo's daughters. He didn't pay for her. A native counsel was called. Chief Ragundo had rendered decision. The nose of the offender was cut off, the woman was flogged severely. With unheard-of audacity she had gone to the *Commandant* to complain of being beaten. It is against the law of France to flog women. The *Commandant* had summoned Chief Ragundo to the post. Ragundo defended that he owned the woman, she was goods and chattels to be disposed of as he wished, to be punished or rewarded as he wished, as was the custom of his people from time

out of mind. But the *Commandant* would not accept his defense. He fined Chief Ragundo ten francs. Unless the Great White King loaned his good friend, Chief Ragundo, the money, the chief would have to go to jail.

Huntingdon was only too glad to donate the money and be rid of the whole gang.

Then acute languor claimed him. For days he reclined on the divan on the veranda.

He knew Mbèga would faithfully look after the factory, but Makàya and Ngumbè took advantage of their master's weakness.

The house was neglected and filthy. Makàya drank a great deal; he used only canned foods; they were sent in wretchedly cooked and never on time. Ngumbè attended table clad only in a cloth and reeking with the *boquet d'Afrique*.

Huntingdon had not a coat with a button on; his clothing were a wretched color, indifferently ironed and scorched and in general badly used. But he had no idea of his unkempt appearance; he concentrated upon the passing of time; he forced his thoughts to civilization; his only letters were to the woman he loved and to his father about business.

At last May came.

The rains stopped. Thank God!

Huntingdon welcomed cooler breezes and clear skies. He ordered his guns brought forth, cleansed and primed.

With Ogula, the shootman, and Nkömbi Kakhi, his brother, he set out to hunt.

Not only was the bush impenetrable, but the exertion of getting there was too much for him and he was compelled to return immediately.

Again came inaction, thought and forced endurance.
Patiently he waited until the middle of June.

Again he set forth, but again fatigue and languor sent him home. He was soft from the long wet, the heat, repeated fever, improper food and no exercise. He would be all right when the dry season advanced, as the winds grew cooler.

Winds grew cooler and Huntingdon shivered with cold. He, who just two years before had laughed so when Smithson had demanded if he had brought out blankets, needed blankets and plenty of them; he was nervous, irritable, weak and sick!

August came for the third time and with it the *Dwarf*. Again a great hunt was organized, but Huntingdon was the first to drop out.

Again the rains and mosquitoes and monotony and increased attacks of fever. But Huntingdon was on the homeward stretch and he literally flogged himself into action.

Daily he worshiped at the shrine of the woman he loved. He made a litany of her parting words and repeated them when endurance was at bursting point:

Forget you, my Love of Loves. I should forget to breathe first!

He nurtured her kisses upon his lips.

He strove and endured, strove and endured!

Only eight months more! Only eight months more, then Marjorie and release!

CHAPTER XIX

'TWAS the middle of November.

The Plains of Mandji and the great stretches of primeval forests, and even the sea, had long since lost their charms! They were the same, always the same. Day after day, at a certain hour, the sun was at the same spot in the heavens. Day and night came and went with monotonous regularity. Sunset at six, sunrise at six. Eternal sameness, eternal repetition, soul-destroying to an active temperament bred in the rush and roar and rattle of civilization.

Huntingdon could not bear it longer! He must seek change or go mad!

He would go to the Fernand-Vaz. He would again make personal calls on chiefs. He would stimulate them to cut more logs. Above all, he would get away from the monotony of Cape Lopez.

'Twas raining. The water fell like polished drill rods, in straight, incessant streams. The sun shone and grizzled and maddened.

Across the Bay at the Village of Sangatanga, Chief Ogandaga advised Huntingdon to leave his big canoe and take a smaller one—a dugout. It would make better time over narrow streams and would take him into territory not yet penetrated by white man.

A pilot familiar with the waterways and country was absolutely necessary.

Chief Ogandaga regretted his inability to accompany Huntingdon. The *Commandant* had summoned him to a palaver at Cape Lopez and he must obey. But he offered his son-in-law, Nagèsa, as pilot, steersman and interpreter.

Huntingdon's own canoe and men were returned to Cape Lopez. Makàya and Ngumbè alone were retained.

Ogandaga's men were ugly, repulsive, rather squat, and not at all confidence begetting. None of them spoke English, but Ngumbè could interpret.

The canoe was long and narrow and in the stern was a small deck house which kept out rain, and afforded shade.

Huntingdon had been traveling for two days. It had been raining furiously. Nights had been spent in small, wretched, uncomfortable towns. There were the eternal begging palavers and maledictions against the French; the eternal forcing of native women upon him; his increasing bribes to drive them off.

On the third day, towards noon, rains ceased temporarily. The sun came out brilliant and hot.

Formerly canoeing had interested Huntingdon; he enjoyed it thoroughly; he was entranced with the beauty of the country.

But all was changed now.

The journey was irksome, dreadfully so, and he never so much as glanced at the country.

For hours he sat inert or lay doubled up in the deck house, which was too short to permit his stretching at full length.

From time to time the paddlers called his attention to monkeys scampering from tree to tree. Huntingdon

knew a little more about monkeys now. They never throw cocoanuts at passers-by. They are extremely timid and hard to approach.

Suddenly Nagèsa drew Huntingdon's attention to a herd of hippopotami on a bank some yards distant ahead.

Huntingdon was immediately interested.

He sighted, fired, and a big beast dived backward into the water, followed by the others.

He commanded Nagèsa to draw near the bank and wait for the injured beast to come up.

To Huntingdon's surprise, there was consternation among the natives.

They questioned each other with their eyes.

Nagèsa answered his brothers by deliberately steering *away* from the hippopotami!

It was the first insubordination offered Huntingdon. He did not know what to make of it.

He was miles away from anywhere, with strange, superstitious savages. Makàya was a coward and would not fight if he had a whole arsenal of arms and knew how to use them. Ngumbè was faithful, but would he have the courage to take a stand against such an overwhelming number of his brothers? Huntingdon feared not.

Yet Huntingdon's blood warmed to the adventure. He was numb from the narrow quarters of the canoe and a bit of excitement was welcome. He felt that it was coming.

Nagèsa said something in the *Orouongo* tongue.

The paddlers commenced to chatter like a lot of monkeys, while they stroked as hard as they could.

“ Silence ! ” thundered Huntingdon.

So short and stern was the command, that every negro turned to look upon the white man.

“ Look them river horse for back ! ” was Huntingdon’s next command.

Not a man obeyed ! Instead they rested on their paddles and gazed sullenly at Huntingdon.

Huntingdon felt like blowing off every negro’s head. But he knew that would never do.

He laid his rifle across his knee and lighted his pipe — he was thinking, thinking, wondering what was the best move to make.

Again came the jabbering among the paddlers.

They were arguing something, pointing wildly towards the clump of bushes in front of which the hippopotami had dived and the other shore distant only a few feet from the nose of the canoe.

Suddenly there came an exclamation of terror from one of the paddlers ! Away shot the canoe as though the very devil were after it !

The men pulled upstream like mad and in deep silence for full twenty minutes. The mutiny aroused all Huntingdon’s fighting blood and he prepared for action, silently and deftly so that the savages would not suspect his purpose.

He continued to lean against the left upright of the deck house. It permitted him to keep one eye on Nagèsa behind him and the other on the paddlers in front. He was higher than the paddlers, and stealthily he braced his repeating rifle with his knee until the gun covered them. His left hand was ready to grasp his revolver, the holster of which he had worked to his left

side by rubbing against the deck house. At the first sign of danger to himself he would kill Nagèsa and the rest would be easy — for the other savages were in front of him.

But his intention was checkmated.

Nagèsa said something to Ngumbè, and, to Huntingdon's great surprise, Ngumbè crawled aft along the gunwale and squatted alongside Nagèsa. The space was small and there was scarce room for two men ; Ngumbè's knee, therefore, was against Huntingdon's revolver and prevented its use.

Huntingdon wanted to command Ngumbè to return to his position, and more than ever he longed to question Nagèsa.

But he did neither.

Apparently careless and indifferent he sat there, but every sense was alert attending the next move of the savages.

He wondered if he could get Ngumbè and Nagèsa with the same bullet. He could, if he would aim now — but that would be senseless.

Yet if he waited until danger threatened his person, 'twould be too late. Ngumbè would grab his left arm and Huntingdon would be powerless.

Would Ngumbè dare lay hands on him? Ngumbè would be foolhardy to offer him bodily hurt when secret poison was as effective and less liable to discovery.

Huntingdon had one regret, only one : and it was in keeping with the *sang-froid* of the Bedford's and the Granvilles. *He wished he were clothed in fresh white duck instead of ragged khaki. A corpse looks so much better in white!*

Suddenly the speed of the canoe was slackened and she came to a standstill amid stream.

'Twas the Agulé branch of the Ogôwe River. It was narrow, lined on both sides by papyrus and other high reeds, and backed by the dense growth of the equatorial forests.

Not a canoe rested on either bank, indicating a near-by village.

Not a canoe was visible on the water — and day was fast dying. Suddenly, fatigue overpowered Huntingdon; he had fever; he was alternately hot and cold; his eyes burned and with difficulty he kept them open.

Oh, bother the palaver!

Let the savages go hang!

He leaned back and closed his eyes. He gave himself up to languor.

Suddenly the strong smell of mission-grown tobacco assailed his nostrils.

"Put out that pipe," he commanded roughly, sitting upright.

The paddlers stared at Huntingdon. Surprise was big in their faces.

They had always smoked; it was customary to smoke in a canoe.

But it was not customary to smoke in Huntingdon's canoe. He never permitted a servant to smoke in his presence. The paddlers did not know this, of course, and Huntingdon never suspected that they did not know it.

Hence the astonishment at the command.

Huntingdon saw only continued mutiny and insolence in the stares of the savages.

Quick as a flash he raised his rifle, and sighted. From the mouth of the smoker the pipe fell, cracked into bits!

Huntingdon felt that he was in for it. At the risk of upsetting the canoe he deliberately turned broadsides, he held his revolver aft, the rifle pointing forward.

Again the excited jabbering among the natives!

Huntingdon could not interpret one word they said!

Were they discussing which was the quickest and best way to kill him?

But as he braced himself for the fight, to his horror, he felt his muscles again relaxing, languor held him in a vice and he wanted to sleep!

To sleep!

Huntingdon straightened himself with a jerk.

Had Makàya, Ngumbè fed him poison!

He imagined he saw a look of triumph on Makàya's ugly, shriveled face. He imagined the reason of Ngumbè's seating himself aft of him.

When the drug overcame him, Ngumbè was to keep him from falling into the water, so as not to endanger the loss of his guns!

Marjorie! flashed through Huntingdon's brain!

For himself he felt rather knocked-up for fight, but he didn't belong to himself, he had to consider her.

“ Ngumbè !”

Huntingdon's voice was so terrifying, that involuntarily Ngumbè's head came down hard on Huntingdon's back.

Huntingdon imagined it the beginning of attack; he hit Ngumbè over the head with the butt of his revolver, knocking him senseless, and causing the blood to flow from his scalp.

“ Makàya! Down flat on your belly or I'll riddle you with shot!” commanded Huntingdon in French, which the others did not understand.

Makàya, the coward, dropped face downward in the bottom of the canoe.

“ Two less against me,” muttered Huntingdon.

But what were the natives jabbering about?

Why didn't they attack him and get it over with?

The shadows were lengthening, night was coming on. Were they going to wait and make way with him in the darkness?

Not if he knew it.

“ Nagèsa, make for shore!”

To Huntingdon's surprise, the fellow instantly obeyed! Willing men bent over paddles.

What savage deviltry was up now?

Huntingdon knew he would have to bivouac for the night in the inhospitable bush — a mangrove swamp likely. Would his dead body be left there, food for lean vultures?

Again he braced himself for resistance. He would start something. He did not like the way things were going.

Just then the canoe came foul of mud, and instantly every paddler was overboard.

They paid no attention to the insensible Ngumbè or to the frightened *Loango*.

Nagèsa leaped over the gunwale and turned his back for Huntingdon to mount.

Huntingdon spurned the man. He was not to be caught napping that way. He essayed to jump into the water, intending to wade ashore. But Nagèsa de-

liberately caught him by the arms and effectively over-powered him!

Huntingdon kicked savagely, but Nagèsa kept on towards the bank.

Suddenly, Nagèsa fell flat and Huntingdon on top of him.

Huntingdon started to curse roundly at the impudence of the fellow's daring to precipitate him into the muddy water, but the words froze in his mouth, at the sight which met his gaze!

A crocodile darted away with the speed of an arrow and disappearing down his jaws was a human leg!

Huntingdon's nerves gave way. Unmindful of more crocodiles and of other dangers, he sat waist deep in the water *staring, STARING, STARING*, at Nagèsa crawling to shore, his right leg bitten off neat at the knee joint!

The paddlers surrounded Nagèsa.

Nagèsa spoke rapidly.

Huntingdon forced himself to crawl to shore.

He couldn't understand a word the savages said!

Now they were *sure* to murder him!

What a foolish move it was to knock Ngumbè senseless!

He was the only one who could interpret the language of the *Ouroougoes!*

The blood flowing from Nagèsa's mutilated knee brought back Huntingdon's nerve. The man must have attention, or he would bleed to death!

"Makàya, Makàya," Huntingdon shouted.

Makàya slouched forward.

"Hurry, you *nigger*, or I'll skin you alive," shouted Huntingdon in French.

Fear lent the *Loango* movement.

“ Bring medicine kit, one time.”

A lantern was lighted.

Night had fallen.

It was raining again and the humidity was growing thicker.

The dank smell of the swampy ground, the nearness of the savages and the fresh blood were almost too much for Huntingdon, weak as he was. But he had work to do — he must stop Nagèsa's blood if possible!

What were the savages jabbering about?

And what for was that fool Nagèsa wasting his fast waning strength in mouth-palaver?

Huntingdon opened his surgical case. He would give the fellow a powerful hypodermic, then make a *tourniquet* in an effort to stop the blood-flow.

He got out his needle. He searched for morphine. He advanced towards Nagèsa, then suddenly paused, for out of the shadows came a whisper, only a whisper and it was in French:

“ *Never use him, Master, never use him. Black man he fear white man magic!* ”

The warning came from Makàya, Makàya, the coward!

Huntingdon was NOT TO OFFER TO STOP THE FLOW OF NAGÈSA'S LIFE BLOOD!

Verily, the way of the savage was beyond his civilized comprehension.

And why did Nagèsa not stop talking?

“ Coffee, Master? ” questioned Makàya, as though he had not exactly heard his master's command.

Huntingdon had not given any command — he had

said nothing. Fatigue and sleep were again besieging him.

But he knew that Makàya was prompting him — the *Loango* would save him — if salvation were possible.

“Yes, coffee, Makàya! And make him strong, savvy, proper strong,” and Huntingdon’s tones conveyed a threat.

He would play up to the *Loango*. The savage knew the ways of his brethren. He would meet their cunning with cunning!

Huntingdon was aware full well that he never could win out alone — never!

He knew Nagèsa must die — and perhaps Ngumbè was already dead.

He knew the law of the savages — a life for a life.

He was in their power; would they exact the penalty from him — his blood for the blood of their brother?

The rain was coming down in torrents.

The mosquitoes descended in droves.

Huntingdon was tortured almost to madness.

The noise of the rain on the dense overgrowth was so loud that wild animals could approach unheeded.

If he had to go, Huntingdon preferred the beasts to the savages; no, he had his revolver. Self murder were less ignoble. It should be that — in extremity.

Then he made a startling discovery.

His revolver was jammed from its *ducking in the stream!*

Neither barrel nor trigger would move!

But he mustn’t let the savages know his revolver was useless!

His scatter gun and rifle were all right, but they were

in the canoe. The savages would never let him get them — never!

Makàya was bending low over a fire on which the coffee kettle commenced to boil.

An evil looking thing he appeared over the fire's red glow, and over there where the bleeding man lay were the shadows, dense shadows. Huntingdon could not see what was taking place, but the voices were less loud, and Nagèsa's had stopped.

The rain commenced to drip through the dense foliage overhead. Huntingdon was shivering with cold.

"Makàya, my chair from the canoe and my rain coat."

The collapsible chair sunk deep in the soft ground as Huntingdon sat upon it. His rain coat was heavy, but he forced himself to endure it.

Makàya brought the coffee.

Huntingdon and Makàya were alone. They, too, were in the shadows.

Huntingdon took the cup, then suddenly thrust it to Makàya's mouth.

"Drink!" was all he said.

Makàya hesitated, just for a snap shot of time, but it came near being his death warrant.

Huntingdon's fingers closed on the negro's windpipe. He could not see the fellow's face — the night was too black — but his fingers told him the wretch drank.

Huntingdon drained the cup and three others in quick succession.

The warm coffee braced him up, but he knew it would soon pass away. He needed something stronger, and he needed food badly.

There were a live chicken in the canoe and plenty of other *chop*.

Makàya must cook some supper.

But what were the savages doing over there in the shadows!

Their voices had ceased all together.

Huntingdon feared their silence more than he had their excited jabbering.

Suddenly an *Orouongo* came from the shadows and said one word:

“ *Allumette.*”

Huntingdon gave him a box of safety matches, the last he had in a small waterproof case. But there were more matches in the canoe.

Yes, there were many things in the canoe Huntingdon would like to have — his scatter gun, for instance.

Makàya could get it in the darkness.

But could he wholly trust Makàya?

Once the savages suspected Makàya, he was done for.

Ngumbè must be dead. The rain would have revived him e'er this, if he had only swooned.

The ground was so wet and miry that the *Orouongoes* built their fires in the forks of the giant mangroves. The silvery feelers of the trees were gaunt and bare, like skeleton's claws reaching for victims. On their twisted branches the paddlers, like birds of evil, perched, and sullen and silent, gazed into the fires, while *manioc* boiled merrily in iron kettles.

The fires intensified the weird surroundings and enhanced the white man's nervousness.

’Twas an uncanny sight, an uncanny spot.

The breath of the swamp was heavy, depressing, the

rain came down in torrents, and, now and then, acute lightning pierced the bush and ominous thunder growled.

To the rear was dense, impenetrable jungle, inhabited by the most dangerous of beasts. In front was a rapidly flowing, muddy stream infested by crocodiles and hippopotami. Staring sullenly into the fires were the savages, whom Huntingdon fancied were executioners waiting to dispatch him.

Suddenly Huntingdon imagined that great snakes were wriggling towards him. He moved restlessly. A branch overhead caught his hat.

He jumped up. He was sure that a leopard was about to drop upon or a savage attack him! He started to run, and sank knee deep into the mire, from which he could not extricate himself.

The thick mud and loam penetrated his khaki clothing and soft mosquito boots; hordes of mosquitoes attacked him; he shook with chills; he burned with fever.

Nobody paid any attention to him!

Makaya was taking a very long time to prepare his master's supper.

And now the *Loango* had disappeared. Huntingdon again imagined a stealthy approach from his rear.

Held fast by the mire, he exerted all his failing strength. He got one foot free, then, grasping a branch of a tree, he wrestled the other from the clinging mire and slowly crawled to the tree's fork, from whence he sat blinking at the fires, and shivering at every sound, unconscious of the fact that both his boots were left sticking in the mud!

Well, he wanted an adventure and he got it.

It would be his last — he felt confident of that.

Through his mind trouped all the grawsome tales of the old coasters.

They spoke truth after all. They *knew* Africa. It was indeed Hell's Playground. What a fool he was to think that *he* could do the impossible: wrestle with it, single handed and alone.

He laughed aloud, like a thing suddenly gone mad.

Still nobody paid any attention to him.

He could see Makàya now. He was in a fork of a mangrove just a little bit to the rear, cooking supper.

My, how slow the *nigger* was! And how sleepy Huntingdon was! If he only dare relax, sleep would come on the instant; he was so weary, so tired, so languid! But he dare not sleep. The savages would be sure to murder him in some fashion not to leave any traces, then they would take his dead body back to Cape Lopez and swear that he died from fever and exposure.

He knew he ought to have quinine and stimulants and blankets; that he ought to return to the canoe, to the shelter of its deck house and its mosquito bar, but he had not the strength to call Makàya, he could only stare at the fires and hope to keep awake.

Subconsciously, he wondered what Nagèsa was doing over there in the shadows. Was the life blood still flowing, or had it fled, taking the fellow's ghost with it?

The *manioc* was cooked and about the pots the *Ouroungoes* gathered, eating ravenously, in eerie silence. The meal finished, pipes were lighted, but Huntingdon was too far spent to remonstrate against anything the savages did, except to attack him, and, weak though he was, he prepared to defend himself.

How could he repulse them? He needed some weapon.

And any number of them were down at the water's edge in the canoe, but he knew he never could get them.

Quietly and laboriously he unloosened the chair from the mire, and folded it.

When Makàya brought his food, he took great pains to impress upon Makàya what a delightful table the chair made across his knees!

As he ate the rain dripped lively upon his food. But he did not mind it.

He ate with his fingers too, this scion of the esthetic Bedfords and Granvilles, this erstwhile dandy of Mayfair drawing-rooms.

And he ate what he knew was dirt, too, ravenously, faster than even the savages had eaten their simple meal of sour *manioc*.

Poor devils!

He had tins enough to supply them.

He would like to make them comfortable — but they would misunderstand his motive.

If they kept away from him all night, he would not approach them.

If daylight were allowed to come before they took action against him, he had a fighting chance, but in the dark he was wholly at their mercy.

A quick thrust from behind and all would be over!

Despite his determination to remain awake, weariness and exhaustion overpowered him.

He lost consciousness, to be startled into wakefulness by pandemonium all about him!

The whole swamp was ablaze!

Earth seemed to have opened and all hell and dancing demons were abroad!

The very feelers of the ghostly mangroves writhed in torturesome curves and advanced and retreated! They jeered, they pantomimed, they menaced!

Black things were jumping up and down and making hideous sounds!

'Twas some moments before Huntingdon could gather his wits.

Then the truth flashed over him.

His time had come! The savages were keyed up for his sacrifice!

What else could their dancing, their clamor, their menacing gestures mean?

Lord, what a racket, what a din!

Where did the savages get the implements with which to make such clatter, such ear-splitting sounds?

Huntingdon's eyes focused on a big *Ouroongo*. He was pounding vigorously upon a tin trunk with a frying pan!

Huntingdon stopped his fingers into his ears. The din was driving him crazy.

Every nerve in his brain throbbed like pistons driven by dynamic force.

His hands encircled his head to keep it from flying to pieces.

"Stop it, you fiends from hell, stop it!" he yelled.

But no one heard him.

He leaned against the mangrove, exhausted.

He was so cold, so wet, so tired, oh, so very tired!

Death would mean sleep — rest, at least.

But the infernal savages tortured him by putting off his death from hour to hour. And what manner of death would they employ?

He idly wondered where the savages got the dried wood to keep up the blazing fires.

He wondered, too, how the wounded Nagèsa could stand the hellish rumpus.

Then out of the general uproar a weird chant beat upon his strained nerves. Louder and louder it rose; faster and faster danced the savages.

One by one they fell, only to rise again and continue to jump up and down with renewed abandon!

They were devils, nothing but devils!

The white man was a fool to try to civilize them or to attempt to wrestle wealth from their country!

In suspense Huntingdon died a thousand deaths. He would have done violence to himself, but he had not the power to move arm or leg!

He could only look on and suffer.

Slowly night lifted, and, like a reluctant thing, sad-eyed Dawn stole out.

Huntingdon never welcomed anything so much in all his life!

Haggard, worn, and thoroughly spent, Huntingdon looked towards Nagèsa.

He was DEAD!

Huntingdon understood the dance! 'Twas to keep off evil spirits — devils who came to steal the souls of living men!

Huntingdon thought it a chimera of his weary brain when Ngumbè came to him.

There was a hole in his head, blood had dried on his face and his eyes were sunken and unusually large.

"Master," he said humbly, "Orouongo want for go for him town with Nagèsa. You fit let him go?"

Huntingdon started, incredulous.

So this was the end of it all.

He laughed like a wild man!

Ngumbè turned away, explaining something in *Our-oungó*.

Then Makàya spoke, Makàya, the coward.

“Master, it be wise palaver to let Nagèsa people tek him for him town,” he said in French.

Of course they could take him to his town. ’Twas the very thing Huntingdon wanted.

It was his salvation!

Sullen were the faces turned toward the white man as Ngumbè delivered his master’s implied refusal for the removal of the dead Nagèsa.

Though Huntingdon knew it not, it was the moment of his greatest danger.

The superstitious fears of the savages regarding the dead were coming into play.

Unless they got Nagèsa to his town where they could hold the customary feast over his death, evil spirits would descend upon the men who had failed Nagèsa in his extremity.

Nagèsa himself would haunt them unto death — every one of them was a marked man.

While they shook now with nervous, superstitious dread, yet that very dread would arm them to do violence to Huntingdon, to make way with him that Nagèsa might have the proper death feast in his own town surrounded by his wives and his peoples!

Towards the canoe in his stocking feet Huntingdon walked as bravely as possible, but it was all he could do to keep his balance. He was dizzy and the ground

was swampy and slippery, and the rain continued to fall.

“Ngumbè,” he cried, “tell them *Ouroungoes* we fit for take walk one time for Nagèsa’s town.”

The command was received with satisfaction, and Huntingdon never made such a quick canoe journey in all his life.

When the town of Chief Ogandaga at Sangatanga was reached Huntingdon was delirious with fever.

When his senses returned, he was in his own bed, and a black woman was attending him!

She gave him some sort of hot broth.

He turned over and went to sleep — normal sleep; the first he had had in months!

CHAPTER XX

THE woman was Ndio, the *Gabonaise*!

She had bided her time. She was of Africa and she knew her country's ways!

It was when the crisis of blackwater fever was approaching. Huntingdon's skin took on the different shades of yellow, while his face was blood red; his eyes protruded alarmingly and the secretions of his kidneys were the very fluids of life.

Moore and LeBlanc had done what they could for him. But it was little. They had grown indifferent to suffering. Huntingdon was left to his fate. He grew violent. Makàya, Ngumbè, Mbèga, Ogula and Nkombi Kakhi fled from him in terror. Their master was bewitched! He was left alone to die!

In delirium he jumped from his bed and was about to leap into the bay, when Ndio, the *Gabonaise* came; Ndio, the imperious; Ndio, the much desired, the coveted of all white men, save him into whose life Fate thrust her!

She forced Ngumbè, Ogula, Nkombi Kakhi and Mbèga to take Huntingdon to his bed and hold him until the delirium had passed. And this forcing of the savages was no easy task. They are so superstitious that they would as soon take hold of the devil himself as a white man raving and violent. But the imperious *Gabonaise* exacted obedience from her inferiors. They feared her

fury and the vengeance of her powerful tribe even more than they feared the devil in the white man.

The *Gabonaise* despised the modern drugs of civilization and resorted to the simples of her people.

She nursed Huntingdon tenderly and constantly, not out of any duty to save the life of a human being, but because she wanted Huntingdon's body, she wanted the man. In his right senses she had failed to draw even his notice. She could not dominate him by her animalism and beauty as she had conquered other white men. She must try some other way.

Unknown to the white man, for hours and hours she gazed upon his smooth, white flesh, his well-shaped body. The savage in her was wild to possess him, yet she had the cunning not to precipitate matters.

Other white men discarded and changed their mistresses at will. But such commonplace treatment was not for the imperious *Gabonaise*. 'Twas she who did the choosing. 'Twas she who discarded.

She left the *Commandant* without so much as an *Au revoir, Monsieur*. And do what he might, the *Commandant* could not coax her back. She despised his gifts. She denied herself to everybody. She stored up her passion day by day. It should break forth only for the Englishman. He would be hers. He could not escape!

Huntingdon was too weak, too indifferent for anything to make an impression upon him.

His convalescence was slow, tedious. He existed — that was all. Oh, if little Sadler were only there — but he was still in Europe and would not come again for months!

Gradually, there came to Huntingdon a sense of comfort. His bungalow was more homelike; his meals better served; his linen cleaner.

Huge points of ivory and small balls of rubber were piled wherever his eyes lighted. The beach was again lined with red and black wood — as mahogany and ebony are called. For a time he thought it was a chimera of his delirium. Gradually, he learned it was all true and that it was the *Gabonaise* who worked these wonders.

He heard her trading with the natives. In addition to native dialects, she spoke English and French.

The *Gabonaise* was indeed a worthy descendant of the *Mpongwès*, the Jews of the west coast. Huntingdon thought he had made some pretty keen trades, but he saw where he was cheated right and left.

Huntingdon was grateful to the *Gabonaise* and showed his gratitude in every way — except that for which the woman had schemed and denied herself. He showered gifts and comforts upon her. He bought slaves to attend her. She was the best dressed and the most envied native woman from Dakar, in the Senegal, to Saint Paul de Loando, in Portuguese West Africa, a coast line of over 4,000 miles.

The other white men took it as a matter of course that the *Gabonaise* was Huntingdon's mistress. They merely shrugged their shoulders. Such a thing was bound to come. Nothing else was possible. They ridiculed him for having so long lived to himself.

Huntingdon tolerated their hints and their gossip. Other things engrossed his thoughts.

For two boats he had not written home because of his

inability to do so. But he had written now, explaining in full. He spoke warmly of the *Gabonaise* both to his mother and Marjorie. He owed his life to her and he begged them to send her some gift attesting their appreciation of her services.

He spoke of the changes in his living quarters; of their being more cheerful, more comfortable, and above all cleaner. It was the first time he had hinted of discomforts. He told of his desertion by the natives out of fear of his delirium; of the desertion of the white men out of indifference, and the fatalistic belief that death was inevitable for a man sick as he had been.

Huntingdon wrote fully and unreservedly.

He appreciated the agony of his loved ones because of his silence. Particularly did he feel Marjorie's grief. She would mourn him as dead — for death alone would keep him from writing. He could not immediately relieve her agony. When needed most, the cable to Europe was not working. His loved ones would have to await the mails and they were so slow, so slow!

But his letters were all ready awaiting the next steamer. On her way down coast she would bring him letters from Marjorie. Oh, how he longed for her letters! To kiss the paper her hands had pressed, to read words of love, hope, encouragement and cheer! He needed them more than ever. He was so tired, so worn, so weary! He closed his eyes, he felt her lips upon him, he heard her whisper:

Forget you, my Love of Loves. I should forget to breathe first!

He cried the words aloud when he suffered most. He

called on them to help him bear up, to give him the strength necessary to carry out his business project.

To return to England in search of health never entered his head.

There were only four months yet to endure — only four months more!

He lived only to mark off each day of the calendar and to thank God that his purgatory was nearing an end.

In his letter he had asked Marjorie to set a date for their wedding. He lived o'er their honeymoon. How he would love her! His starved being would feed on her sweetness!

Thoughts of his beloved was the elixir he held to his lips. He drank of it continuously. It was the ambrosial food that kept alive his unwilling body.

For the first time in her life the *Gabonaise*, who had made the suffering of white men her pastime, suffered a torment of hell impossible to a civilized nature. She was as hungry as a lioness starved to desperation. Yet she successfully masked the seething demand of her nature.

She spent hours beautifying herself. She polished her skin until it shone like rich red mahogany. She made the most of the silks Huntingdon gave her. She polished her nails as she had seen Huntingdon do. Remembered were the arts the American Missionaries at Libreville had taught her. She hemstitched linens; she made gay cushions; she gathered fresh flowers; she concocted dainty desserts; she administered unto Huntingdon in every possible way. She was ever at hand to

anticipate his wishes. She ruled his factory as though she owned it. Where Huntingdon had solicited trade, she demanded it, and, partly through fear of her vengeance, and through their continued admiration for the Great White King, the savages poured their products in large quantities into Huntingdon's factories.

But the beauty, the arts and attentions of a thousand Circes could not seduce Huntingdon. His was one of those rare, intense natures, that loves but once; that clings to its vows as rigidly as does a Carmelite to his. His was no idle boast when he said to Marjorie: *Countless eternities shall find me still remembering!* Her image was always before him — it beckoned him on and ever on, it was the lodestar that drew him from out the very shadow of the valley of death and gave him the courage to fight on!

At last the imperious *Gabonaise* had to admit that she could not win the white man by any arts of her own.

She sought the magic of the witch doctor of the *Ouroungoes*.

She paid the *Nganga* enormous sums for his charms. She placed the charms in the band of Huntingdon's helmet; under his mattress; in the cushions on which he rested; they hung over his head, they were under his feet.

But to no avail.

Huntingdon constantly dreamed of home.

Three months and two weeks now — three months and two weeks!

How slowly time went! It seemed to sleep on the way. To forget to register passing seconds.

Patience, PATIENCE, PATIENCE!! Exquisite hell to

a heart burning with longing, with a body raked by fever and exhausted from endurance.

But time must pass. IT MUST!

'Twas the night before the mail was due.

Huntingdon was too nervous, too anticipative for sleep.

He must write again to her — to the woman who filled his thoughts.

When I shall again be with you, Light of my Soul, I shall have entered the Holy of Holies, leaving all longing and pain outside. We shall live in the very Garden of Love.

I've been dreaming what it would be, Light of my Being. If this inanimate sheet should become for the nonce a sensory thing — a conductor of emotion — not emotion exactly —

I cannot write — I can only think. Is it possible that my thought waves reach you, my Beloved? If they only could, if they only could! Into thought waves I project my very soul; that subtle something too evanescent to flow from a pen's rusty point; too beautiful to be tangibly expressed, too sacred to be scribbled! If thou thinkest of me for one short second freely, fully as I think of thee eternally, then indeed am I compensated for being so very distant from you.

Good night, Light of my Heart, Eyes of my Eyes, Desire of my Desire, Breath of my Breath, my Other Half, My Completion, my Necessity. Good night!

His pen rolled unheeded upon the floor. His eyes became large, luminous. They annihilated space, they pierced leagues of water and land. He was by Mar-

jorie's side, he heard her soft, sweet murmur: *Forget you, my Love of Loves, I should forget to breathe first.* He pressed his lips to hers, he stopped her words, he felt her nearness.

His eyes closed. His head sank slowly to the table. His breathing was scarcely audible. Physical discomforts, bodily pain had flown. Complete exhaustion enveloped him. Thought was stilled, feeling was banished.

The *Gabonaise* stole in.

She bent over the white man.

She could not hear him breathe. She was alarmed.

She raised his head. His eyes looked for a second into hers, then closed again.

Satisfied that exhaustion alone possessed him, she lightly rubbed a charm over his head and eyes. It was to make him to dream of her — to see only her when he should awake!

The break of day found Huntingdon on the veranda. He was pale as a ghost and thin unto emaciation. Longingly he scanned the bay for a glimpse of the European steamer.

Other days had seemed unendurable, but this day seemed to stand still.

Perhaps the steamer was lost — wrecked on that terrible coast! The thought brought him renewed torture.

He sent Ngumbè to the post office for news of the steamer.

She was all right; she had left Libreville, she would arrive at Cape Lopez about 5 p. m.

Closely the *Gabonaise* guarded the white man and watched for a sign of the working of the magic of the witch doctor.

She coaxed Huntingdon to take food. In it was blended the yellow of a crocodile's egg to make his love blaze forth for her and her alone.

But Huntingdon would not eat.

"You will be sick again for skin, Monsieur Huntingdon. And you never live for tek walk for civilization, to look your peoples unless you take *chop*," she coaxed.

He would eat, but he wanted only fruit. He would take champagne too — a whole *litre*. He needed his strength — to read her letters, *her* letters!

At last the steamer came.

Huntingdon saw but one letter that interested him.

It was Marjorie's. He kissed the envelope and blessed the little hand that had addressed it. How happy its contents would make him! In it was the date of their wedding. *Their wedding!* Sympathy, companionship, love would soon be his; they were a trinity necessary to his very being! Already his exile and its tortures were falling from him, they were of the past; the future and Marjorie had come into being! How strong he was; physical weakness had vanished before the reality of the letter he held in his hand: the letter naming their wedding day; the reward for his sufferings, his tortures, the reward for his incessant labors and fidelity! Oh, how thankful he was that he had had the strength to remain true unto her! He would tell her all about his temptations some day — some day when they were settled in their own home, and a child, a part of Marjorie's being and his, had come to bless them. How could he ever have the courage to leave home again and come out to the coast even at remote intervals to look after his interests? But sufficient unto the day is

the evil thereof. Marjorie was with him, there in her letter — Marjorie —

Why how thin was her letter; only one sheet! She was ill, of course she was ill. Perhaps she had died while the letter was *en route* to him! Died and left him! Perish the thought!

Nervously he tore open the letter — no date, no endearing salute — what words were those — ah, he was crazy — Hell's Playground sported with his brain — the joy at the receipt of her letter was too much for his weakened state; his overwrought senses made hideous distortions of the words penned by the hand of his beloved!

I have been informed why you have not written. You have a native wife and child. Of course you recognize that a marriage between you and me is impossible. I have sent your ring and your gifts to your mother.

Truly he must be mad. That was no letter from Marjorie. Delusion was the worst trick Hell's Playground had yet played him. Marjorie repudiate him, doubt him, cast him off! Ah, his brain was weak and totally incapable of translating written words; he would lay the letter aside; he would force himself to take nourishing food and plenty of champagne. Clearness of brain would come to him, then he would read what she had written: the date of their wedding, her appeal to come to him, as quickly as he could. And oh, wouldn't he go? He would take the French steamer ten days hence on her way up coast. Why had he not thought of that sooner? Mbèga and the *Gabonaise* could look after the Cape Lopez factory and at his other factories in the bush there were efficient, honest men. Yes,

he would go home. He would not delay another moment.

He shouted for Ngumbè and ordered him to pack up. He summoned Mbèga and the *Gabonaise*; he raised Mbèga's wages; the *Gabonaise* would receive whatever sum she might name for her services; Huntingdon would never again live in his bungalow, the *Gabonaise* could have it. He would go to Marjorie at once; the voyage would bring back his health and strength.

In his excitement he ate a hearty evening meal and drank much. Over and over again he planned his immediate return to civilization. He pictured Marjorie's joy and delight at his early coming to her — but what words were those stealing through his brain — advancing and retreating like a thing of evil: — *native wife and child — marriage between you and me impossible* —

Pshaw, would Hell's Playground besiege him forever! Make of his brain an implement of torture, of his thoughts a constant inquisition!

He had other letters from civilization. He would open them, he would prove conclusively that his brain was incapable of lucid thought.

Prove? Why necessary to *prove* anything in regard to Marjorie; he took her on faith alone, as she took him. *As she took him!* Why should such a thought come into being? Faith was part of his very soul, the escutcheon of the noble houses of the Bedfords and Granvilles; faith, the lever which controlled their acts and thoughts; faith, without which life would be intolerable. Such faith was Marjorie's too; she had sworn it!

There was a letter from his father; he would read

that. Strange that its meaning was perfectly clear; strange that it should be all about business; and that there was no mention of Marjorie or his mother —

Quickly he tore open another letter, from his brother Guy. It was also perfectly clear. Guy congratulated him on his shipments and the big prices prevailing in the European markets for African products; yet there was something strange in that letter too: there was no mention of Marjorie — nor of his mother!

Marjorie — Good God, was he sane after all and did his brain correctly interpret her words —

Over and over again he read her brief letter until it was indelibly engraved on his brain and its meaning was perfectly clear!

So unexpected, so heavy was the blow that he was completely stunned.

Another day came before he was able to think calmly.

Marjorie had cast him off, why? Because he had not written for several boats? Surely she would take into consideration the uncertainty of letters sent from far-away Africa, the probability of his illness and inability to write —

Suddenly he jumped up with a mighty oath as the thought struck home: somebody had written slanderously and maliciously and willfully about him to Marjorie! That was not surprising, familiar as he was with the malicious, slanderous gossip of the white aliens. No crime was too dastardly for them to concoct! In the heat of her indignation, Marjorie had cast him off. But all would be well again. Marjorie would be tearfully repentant; he would kiss away her tears; her trust in him would be deeper, her love for him greater, as is always

the case when a woman has unjustly accused and doubted the man she loves best.

But who could have been guilty of slandering him? It lay only between two men: Moore and LeBlanc. No, Moore would not do such a thing; it must have been LeBlanc. The Frenchman imagined that the *Gabonaise* was Huntingdon's mistress and jealousy and envy prompted the letter. Poor LeBlanc, to resort to such ignoble means to harm a fellow man who had never done aught to deserve such treachery! But Huntingdon held no animosity against the Frenchman; he took into consideration the smallness of his character; his perverted morals; the pitiful condition to which Hell's Playground had reduced him. But above all, everything would be all right when he held Marjorie close in his arms and explained everything to her. LeBlanc instead of harming him would have brought him the additional blessing of Marjorie's repentance and her subsequent perpetual desire to make amends with unlimited love and trust and confidence. No, he held no grudge against LeBlanc.

Huntingdon imagined letters already *en route* from Marjorie, begging his pardon for her momentary doubt of him. Of course, he would forgive. It was but natural that she should doubt, then repent bitterly for having so hastily condemned him. She was a woman, entitled to the luxury of doubt, then to the subsequent abject misery that would come to her because of that doubt. After all, LeBlanc had done him a favor. Poor LeBlanc! Never to know such perfect love as was Marjorie's and Huntingdon's!

Buoyed up with hope and sure of Marjorie's repent-

ance, Huntingdon walked back and forth along the beach unmindful of the grilling heat and indifferent to fatigue. But sundown brought exhaustion and deep sleep. Suddenly, he found himself wide awake. In the tense stillness of the tropical night Huntingdon's thoughts seemed to take voice and loud and bitterly they attacked Marjorie.

Where was the faith she had sworn so repeatedly? How dare she doubt his word and accept that of an anonymous slanderer? How dare she put him down, unheard, as a poltroon, a liar, all that was detestable? Why did she not ignore the anonymous letter, as he would have done. Why did she not keep her faith in him as he had kept his faith in her?

Ah, there was the great injustice! He had built upon perfect faith and in his extremity he was treated thus! He had given his word to be true, he had been true, and God alone knew what torture he had endured, how sick at heart, how lonely he had been, how his senses had tortured him, how thoroughly spent he was now!

And the woman for whom he had suffered a thousand crucifixions had lightly cast him off with the dash of a pen! Ah, that was the hurt!

Injustice swelled deeply within Huntingdon and became an obsession. Over and over again he fanned its flame and fed it fuel. That Marjorie should even associate doubt in connection with him, that she would permit an anonymous slanderer to cause her to cast him forth as though he were the vilest of wretches, were the tongues of fire that seared his very soul and grilled it excruciatingly! Marjorie well knew how her words

would crush him, how deeply she would cause him to suffer, how cruelly she had outraged what he held most sacred: his honor and his faith! She insulted his honor willfully and deliberately on the word of passing slander! Would he stoop to explanation, defense? Would he recognize the hag, Slander, who ought to be instantly throttled by all honorable people? He would not so demean himself. He had pledged his word, that in itself was enough to bid Slander begone; but Marjorie had entertained Slander, had listened to her, had cast him off at her bidding. If she placed Slander, and her first cousin, Suspicion, above his plighted word, above his honor, he would do naught to kill Slander or dispel Suspicion. Marjorie had judged him unheard; she had sentenced him to what she knew would be the keenest suffering possible to a refined, human being. He disdained defense; he would submit silently and never by word or action of his should she know the suffering she caused him. Defense was for the guilty; he was innocent. He would live his life alone; she had deliberately and unjustly cast him off, she could go her way, he would go his.

He tore up the letters he wrote her; with a curse he cast them forth on the winds.

No tears did he shed; his suffering was silent and within.

His thoughts were his executioners. He could not banish them either with drugs or absinthe. The only thing that could crush him completely had descended upon him, speeded by the hand of the woman he had so madly and persistently worshiped. He was cast off, ignominiously, he was doubted — oh, how he hated civilization

and its refined cruelties! He never again cared to see anybody belonging to it. The white race had dealt him his death blow, he was done with it forever!

Day after day he sat upon the veranda and gazed into space — over the same Atlantic that washes England's shore — daily he grew more bitter against Marjorie; where he loved he now hated intensely. Such injustice as she had done him — she for whom he had suffered so long and painfully — could never be forgotten nor forgiven!

The revelries of the white men of Cape Lopez and the natives came to him on the night's breezes. The shouting, singing and *tom-tom* beating no longer pained him. Nor did he blame the white men for seeking diversion from self and soul-torturing introspection. Perhaps *they* had come just such a cropper as he had in the game of love. Man should never judge another unless he can put himself in that other's place!

If Huntingdon were lonely, miserable, before, what was he now that his beacon of love and hope was extinguished? A ship without a rudder, an alien in a hostile land, a shuttlecock to be battledored as Africa willed!

Huntingdon brooded, he fed daily on life's very forces. He sought no diversion — each day brought him more acute misery.

Life ceased to be endurance — it was one long-drawn-out agony.

He saw Cape Lopez in its true light. It seemed the end of the world, the epitome of all that is depressing and annihilating.

And he had once thought it beautiful!

'Twas raining. The whole earth exuded moisture and sobbed from the sheer misery of it all; the sun, the ravager, reigned supreme. He murdered and tortured. Even torrential rains were impotent to quench Nature's parched throat. Africa sizzled! The sands of the beach were as waves of heat; the very breeze seemed on fire.

Huntingdon knew what would follow the rains. All vegetation would become parched, scorched, lifeless. Woods and plains would burst forth in flame, the air would fill with choking, offensive smoke! And he had once thought forest fires magnificent, the odor of burning brush delightful incense!

Many a white man went down in the fight. At Cape Lopez another *Douane* and the *Chef de Poste* went under. From the bush and throughout all Africa came news of the death of white aliens.

A letter from old Wallace reported Longworthy seriously ill with smallpox; Cartright dead from sun-stroke; little Hertford a victim of a cobra's bite, and Wallace himself just over an unusually severe dose of fever. He advised Huntingdon to let Africa and her wealth *go to hell* and to return at once to civilization — before it was too late.

The *West African Mail* announced the death of Captain Haywood. Cause unknown.

The *White Man's Grave* yawned wide!

Huntingdon peered into the cavern.

But Hell's Playground sported with him. She would not give him his *cachet*.

He lived on and on, his suffering, his sensibilities growing greater!

The *Gabonaise* again sought the witch doctor in his town.

“I have paid you black wood and ivory and gold to buy the Great White King’s love and you have failed,” she complained ominously.

“I have not failed,” confidently answered the *Nganga*. “The magic I gave you is all powerful — not even a white king can prevail against it. But it will not work until — until —”

“Until what,” imperiously interrupted the *Gabonaise*. “Take care, don’t fool with me,” and her eyes blazed disclosing such hideous possibilities that even the sorcerer trembled. But he too was working for a great prize. The animalism of the *Gabonaise* had called forth his in all its savage intensity. The *Gabonaise* must be his.

“Until — you — pay — more —” said the *Nganga*, slowly.

“Palm-kernels, palm-wine, skins, ivories, wood —” began the *Gabonaise*, but the witch doctor interrupted:

“I want none of these things. I have more wealth now than the white man will ever possess were he to live to be as old as the *nchinas*,¹ in the jungles, or *Mboomba*,² the great, fiery snake that lives for the sky, after the rain falls.”

“What then can Ndio, the *Gabonaise*, give to the *Nganga* of the *Ouroungoes* in exchange for the Great White King’s love?”

“Ndio is a *Gabonaise*, of the powerful and mighty *Mpangwès*, to whom the *Ouroungoes* are but slaves. The *Ouroungoes* can buy other woman, but a *Gabonaise* has never mated with an inferior. Now, Ndio, the *Gabo-*

¹ Monkeys.

² Rainbow.

naise shall live in the forest for one week as the wife of the Nganga of the Ouroungoes and the love magic will work at once. The Great White King will no longer resist Ndio, the Gabonaise. She will possess him through Dry Seasons and Wet Seasons so many in number that the Nganga of the Ouroungoes, with all his magic, cannot count them."

Ndio's eyes blazed! Her fingers twitched ominously at the demand of the *Nganga*! But his last words won her completely.

She did not hesitate.

"Ndio, the *Gabonaise*, will come here to-night and for one week she shall be the wife of the *Nganga* of the *Ouroungoes*. But if in that time the Great White King is not hers, the *Nganga* of the *Ouroungoes* shall have no charm to withstand the wrath of the *Gabonaise*! You know my people, the *Mpangwès*! We brook no deception — our cunning will snare you e'en though *Mboomba* herself wrapped you in her protecting coils!"

The sorcerer watched her go, his sensual lips pressed closely together.

He was sure of success. Unless the white man should bring death upon himself, Africa would claim him forever; Africa never capitulated, never compromised. She ruled!

In the week that followed, Huntingdon's life forces were at their lowest ebb.

There was not a breath of air, and, save when lashed by torrential rain, the sea lay smooth as polished jet, blinding, and heat reflecting.

Huntingdon was unclean, disheveled, unrecognizable.

Great spiders, clammy lizards, fat, disgusting roaches,

wasps, flies, mosquitoes, and scorpions besieged him, yet he felt them not. His astral body alone was there — it possessed no sense, no feeling. Dull incessant pain had strangled thought and silenced memory!

Ah, if such inanition would only lash, but the winds of reality again blew on Huntingdon and lashed him into life, into feeling.

Stifling though the heat and humidity were, he shivered with cold. Rivers of ice rushed madly through his arteries, restoring his sensibility to pain.

Forget you, my Love of Loves, I should forget to breathe first, the litany that had so long sustained him and gave him the courage to fight on, began to throb continuously through his brain, mockingly and desirively. It brought a new agony all its own. O'er him again swept infinite misery; the misery that had engulfed Smithson the night he left for the Ogôwe and his death.

Death! Did it silence all memory, all thought, or would he continue to hear: *Forget you, my Love of Loves* —? He could endure no longer. He called loud for absinthe.

The liquor brought short-lived exhilaration; then languor; gradually, acute consciousness again returned; memory awoke; the hateful litany again obsessed and tortured, accompanied by the mournful sob of the sea and the eternal sighing of the giant cocoanut-palms. Dead men's bones, Smithson had called the latter. They were indeed fitting sentinels for that tiny spot up there on the beach which covered up all that was mortal of white aliens who had thought to successfully combat Hell's Playground!

The little burial ground beckoned ; it was ready for another white man ; the sand was flat on the last grave and scrub grass fought for life in the arid surroundings beneath the pitiless sun. Moore would bury him —

Slowly Huntingdon went within his bungalow.

“ Repose ? ” he questioned of a *Derringer*. “ Shall I find the Nirvana of the Hindus — the only oblivion I care for : no thoughts, no memories, a cessation of all sensations — ? ”

Deliberately he placed the pistol under his ear. But mental anguish had made him hypersensitive to touch. The heat of the metal burned his tender flesh. He shrank from it.

He pulled his heavy hair over his temple, laid the pistol thereon and pulled the trigger !

No explosion followed !

The pistol was jammed from excessive humidity and do what he would he could not raise the hammer !

He laughed aloud — like a crazy man — and hurled the weapon from him.

Even death refused to come at his bidding ! . . .

Again he dragged himself to the veranda.

He was exhausted from his attempt at suicide.

For a long time, he lay with his eyes closed. He slept, to be awakened by the call of the inrushing sea. Ah, there was rest ; he would seek it. Why had he not thought of it sooner ? He essayed to rise, determined to plunge into the water’s depths, but, alas, power of locomotion had left him ; his brain alone was active and the sea took up the litany he so thoroughly detested. Rage then possessed him and over and over again he shrieked defiantly towards the offending waters : *For-*

get you, my Love of Loves, I would forget to breathe first!"

The vocal expression brought him a sort of relief and again languor and inertia gripped him.

Gradually, another, a soothing sound, penetrated his senses. After a time he knew them to be the mellifluous tones of a woman's voice; they came to him like celestial music vibrating through perfumed space. Was the end near, release at hand? So fervently did he wish for death, that he sat up, opened his eyes and calmly awaited his dissolution.

Great was his disappointment when he discovered the source of the sounds he thought were celestial.

It was the voice of the *Gabonaise* who was trading with some *Nkömi* women from the Rembo. Never before had Huntingdon recognized the soft music in the voice of the *Gabonaise*; it soothed and attracted him. He gave himself up to its enjoyment. With interest he studied the woman, and for the first time her unusual personality impressed itself upon him.

No more effective contrast could have been chosen to set off her superiority, elegance and beauty. She was as a queen among the low-statured, ugly, flat-breasted, prematurely old *bushwomen*. She radiated magnetism; they repelled.

The *Gabonaise* wore only a *pagne*, the native dress composed of a simple strip of cloth. But it was not soiled, crumpled, and wound indifferently about the waist, as is usual with the savages. It was of soft, pale, yellow silk and was brought tightly across the bust and ended at the ankles. A curiously twisted knot over the left breast held it in place. It suggested a form perfect

in sensuous symmetry, while its color heightened the beauty of the smooth skin that glistened in the sunlight like polished mahogany. Suddenly she gazed at Huntingdon, then advanced toward him with the slow, languorous *abandon* which is the heritage of the savage woman of the torrid zone.

She handed him a voucher to sign.

He noticed her slim, elegant hands; the tapering, supple fingers; the filbert-shaped, highly polished nails; the exquisite, slender throat, and rounded arms.

He glanced at her feet. Their nails, instead of being broken and unsightly like those of the savage, were perfect and well cared for. Nor was she barefooted like the savage. She wore Morocco sandals of richly decorated leather, in which the red and yellow predominated.

Her hair, instead of being woolly and unkempt, was becomingly arranged in a soft roll on either side of a small, exquisitely poised head, and ornamented with pins of carved ivory inlaid with ebony.

Huntingdon could not see her eyes. They were masked by the lowered lids. But he noticed the long, silken, curling lashes; the petulant curve to the short upper lip, so foreign to the negro mouth; the gleam of small, white, perfect teeth, and the deep cleft in a rounded chin.

“LeBlanc is right,” mused Huntingdon idly, “the *Gabonaise* is all he painted her and more.”

Listlessness again overpowered him.

The voucher, unsigned, fluttered to the floor.

The *Gabonaise* bent gracefully and easily, picked up the voucher, signed it herself, and moved away.

“One moment, please!”

Huntingdon did not call her by name. He had never addressed her in a personal manner.

The *Gabonaise* turned, came towards him, her chin tilted, her eyes a mere glint through the almost completely lowered lids.

“How long have you been signing my vouchers?”

“For many moons, Monsieur Huntingdon,” was the answer in those well modulated, beautiful tones that had charmed him a few moments before. But what struck him most was the *Monsieur Huntingdon*. It was unusual on the lips of a native. Even the chiefs and kings addressed the white man as *master*, or *king*!

“Signing vouchers is no business of yours!” said Huntingdon rather severely. “I would rather you took no part in my affairs. I have already shown my appreciation for your services during my illness and your supervision of my household. You will please concern yourself no more about my business.”

The *Gabonaise* made no reply, but her eyes flashed wide open, as she turned and slowly, majestically, passed out of sight.

Such eyes — Huntingdon had never before seen anything like them. They were large, dark, lustrous, intense, mysterious. With what scorn they had looked at him! Yet how they beckoned, promised, denied! They confessed much; they hid more. In them lay a woman’s soul, fathomless, inscrutable, fascinating, compelling!

Weak, miserable and almost dead though he was, those eyes pierced his innermost being. His pulse beat a trifle faster, his blood flowed slightly stronger, yet no desire smote his senses.

Fate, however, was steadily weaving her web. She pulled on the strings of perception, she commenced a newer, a brighter design; completed and left behind was dull introspection. The Siren of Interest threaded the bobbin.

Two days later as Huntingdon went in to luncheon, the *Gabonaise* disappeared, after having seen that everything was in order.

For the first time Huntingdon noticed the monogram embroidered in his table linen, the excellence of his table and its appointments. The china and silver and glass-ware shone. The napery was perfectly laundered. There was a center piece of rich purple irises, glistening with the dew of the forest.

The books on the shelves were evenly arranged. There was a new shade for the lamp. The floor was clean. New mats were thrown on it and there were dainty, white swiss curtains at the windows.

Everywhere were traces of a woman's care and attention.

Ngumbè was again clothed in decent white ducks. He stood behind his master's chair. He served him intelligently and well.

For the first time in months, Huntingdon relished his food.

"Makaya is improving in cooking," he remarked as Ngumbè gave him a second portion of mullet. "This fish is deliciously cooked."

"Makaya never done him, Master. It be them *Gabonaise*. She savvy cook palaver, plenty, plenty. She be proper woman far past them *Ouroungoes*. She learn from them 'Merican mission at Libreville."

Huntingdon ate the rest of his luncheon in silence. The coffee served, Ngumbè disappeared, as was his wont, to eat his *chop*.

All was still — the heavy, oppressive stillness of mid-day tropical Africa. There wasn't a breath of air nor sound of life. Huntingdon seemed to be the only one alive on the entire planet.

Suddenly, an overwhelming desire for companionship swept over and convulsed him.

He groaned aloud in his misery. The cry was wrung from him, nor was he conscious of its utterance until the *Gabonaise* bent over him.

“Huntingdon, you are ill!” she cried impulsively.

In the voice of the *Gabonaise* was an ocean of sympathy, in her wondrous eyes was tenderness, in her presence was companionship!

Yet she touched him not; she dared not; she knew that all advances must come from him.

Huntingdon turned towards her as naturally as does the sunflower to the sun god.

“Were you ever ill?” he demanded.

“Ndio, the *Gabonaise*, is never ill.”

She pronounced it An-dee-o, and she spoke softly, slowly, languorously, musically.

“Sick never ketch her skin. Look.”

She took his hand and rubbed it over her polished flesh. It was smooth and firm, and, wonderful to relate, cool.

“The *Ouroongo* woman never beautiful like Ndio. Monsieur Huntingdon, the *Gabonaise* has sent the fever from your skin, now you fit to let Ndio mek your skin

all same like hers?" she coaxed as though he were a child.

Huntingdon could not help but smile.

"Sit down, if you please, and tell me about it."

He brought forth a chair for her. But she preferred a cushion at his feet.

Her beautiful arms rested on his knees and she looked up into his face.

Suddenly, he drew away.

The eyes of the *Gabonaise* dropped and she said, sadly:

"White man never love black woman." Then she reared her head, proudly: "Me, I be *Gabonaise*. Princess for my country. The French Governor for Gaboon has sent for me. I never go, I stay here for Monsieur Huntingdon. The *Commandant* of Cape Lopez, he send me plenty *cadeaux* all time, every day. I say no—I stay for Monsieur Huntingdon. And Monsieur Huntingdon, he never love the *Gabonaise*. *La pauvre An-dee-o!*"

She was like a spoiled child.

Huntingdon laid his hand on her head and said kindly:

"The white man does love the *Gabonaise* but he does not love the trade perfume she wears. It makes white man sick."

"I never *hear*¹ him, Monsieur Huntingdon. He no be good?"

"Not for Ndio, the *Gabonaise* Princess."

She drew away from him, and he imagined tears in her eyes.

¹ Smell.

“Wait,” he said.

He went into his bedroom and returned with French violet water.

He poured some of it on her hand and bade her smell of it.

“Is it not sweet, sweet past trade scent?” he asked.

She sniffed vigorously. He noticed that her nose was flat, ugly, decidedly negroid. Yet her other features more than compensated therefor.

“I never hear him, Monsieur Huntingdon, I never hear him.”

“Let the *Gabonaise* take it and when she comes to Monsieur Huntingdon again, let him never hear them trade scent. It no be proper fine for Ndio, the *Gabonaise* Princess.”

He turned from her, but she placed her hand on his arm, looked into his face, and said plaintively in a voice that thrilled his senses:

“You savvy what Ndio, the *Gabonaise*, go mek for you?”

He shook his head. He watched the shadows come and go in her mysterious eyes. He noticed that they were flecked with brown — after the manner of her race.

Again she took his hand and rubbed it slowly over her arm:

“I mek medceen. I put him for skin — so”— and she vigorously rubbed the back of Huntingdon’s hand. “Monsieur Huntingdon get all same like Ndio, the *Gabonaise*.”

The friction sent a thrill of pleasure through Huntingdon.

He bade her go get the medicine and bring it to him.

All afternoon he waited for her. She did not come. There was no sign of her at dinner time, nor at ten o'clock, when Ngumbè left him for the night.

Again Huntingdon was thoroughly depressed. The night was suffocatingly hot and it was raining.

His thoughts were on the *Gabonaise*. He remembered the touch of her hand, the thrill of new life she sent through him. He wished she were there now. He would talk to her. Her voice was so soothing. She was naïve, refreshing, decidedly picturesque and above all companionable! He was tired of being alone. Tired of his own society.

He was delighted when she appeared.

She walked straight to him, put her head under his nose and said:

“ You hear them scent? He live.”

She must have employed the whole bottle of French violet water. It was strong but vastly better than the rank trade stuff.

Huntingdon was in his resting room on the veranda. The bamboo shades were closely drawn and locked. A lamp, with a rose-colored shade, sent forth a soft glow.

The *Gabonaise* wore a pale blue *pagne* of soft silk, and yellow sandals. They were exceedingly becoming, and Huntingdon's artistic sense was aroused. She was decidedly good to look upon.

From the folds of her *pagne*, the *Gabonaise* drew a bottle.

“ Ndio herself go for bush myself and mek medceen for Monsieur Huntingdon. Rain ketch the skin of Ndio; bush he mek Ndio so.”

She pulled up her *pagne*, disclosing a deep scratch

just below the knee. She appeared as artless as a child.

She took away the pillows from the couch.

"Monsieur Huntingdon must lie down all same like baby, and Ndio, the *Gabonaise*, be fit for mek him strong all same first time Ndio look him."

Huntingdon was in the shadows studying her. The glow of the lamp fell upon her. It glinted along her rich, smooth skin. It hunted out the perfect symmetry of her undraped neck and arms. She was indeed good to look upon!

She was trying to pull the cork from the bottle with her teeth,

"Allow me," he said.

He took the bottle and removed the cork. He looked into her face. No emotion showed upon it. Her teeth gleamed small, white, perfect through her parted lips and the cleft in her chin — so very unusual in a savage, — fascinated him.

"The *Gabonaise* must not spoil her beautiful teeth by pulling corks with them."

"No?" she questioned.

Suddenly it came to Huntingdon that he would like to teach this woman something. She was extremely perceptive — and fascinating and young — yes, she was very fascinating — and healthy.

For the first time in months, weariness did not possess Huntingdon. It had fled from him. He had something to interest him. He had found companionship.

He would not permit her to massage him. He would take her ointment and use it himself. Perhaps, just *perhaps*, he would permit Ngumbè to rub him.

'Twas raining very hard.

How still it was — and sticky — and hot!

He must have air, even though the rain beat in.

He went to open a shutter.

From a table he knocked down something. He picked it up. 'Twas a brass paperweight Marjorie had given him. He thought he had destroyed everything that would remind him of her. The paperweight awakened memories — and hell!

He threw the weight into black night, deliberately and firmly he closed the shutters and locked them.

The *Gabonaise* still stood where the rays of the lamp fell full upon her. Her *pagne* had slipped exposing a small, perfectly molded breast!

“ You’re ready now, Monsieur Huntingdon, for the med—” she began, but Huntingdon’s answer was to take her in his arms and press his lips to hers.

The *Gabonaise* rejoiced, secure in the belief that the charms of the sorcerer had brought about Huntingdon’s surrender.

Huntingdon spent a great deal of time with the *Gabonaise*, but he did not permit her to reside in his house nor to dine with him.

She had quarters of her own. Nor did he permit her to continue to engage in active trade.

He regained his health, and again took personal hold of his business. He was surprised how large it had grown under the management of the *Gabonaise*. The only thing that was neglected was his correspondence. But his father understood why that was — Huntingdon had written him of his illness.

His father had answered, and, delicately hinting that, as there was no need of immediate return to civilization, if his health permitted, the wise thing to do was to try to get possession of other French concessions; to branch out in every possible way. If he needed more clerks, they would be sent out. Huntingdon was not again to overtax his strength. In a year he would doubtless have so enlarged the business and so strengthened it, that he could then return with safety to England.

Huntingdon read between the lines.

His father wished to save him the pain of returning to England so soon after his broken engagement. He also wished to bring before him the trust reposed in him by the men who had given the capital for his enterprise.

Huntingdon's reply to his father was honest and frank.

You know, dear Governor, what it means to us to love — and then to lose through no fault of our own. I was as true to my troth as you have been to my mother — as we Huntingdons and Bedfords and Granvilles have always been to our women. I could not control slander. Had I erred, I might have put up a defense, but to be condemned on hearsay — but, you know, dear old Governor, you know!

I am enjoying the best of health — thanks to a native woman. The one who nursed me before when I was ill — the one who was then nothing to me — but who is now all that I care to find in a woman. You will know what to say to the mater. My stay here is indefinite. I am preparing a report for our stockholders. The next shipment will surprise you. It more than makes up for missed shipments during my illness. Business shall not

suffer — as you know. I have a trust to perform — no man shall lose money through me. Do not fear for me. I am happier and more healthy than I ever expected to be again.

CHAPTER XXI

FOUR years passed away.

Huntingdon was thirty-five years of age, the most attractive, healthful, successful and envied white man on the entire west coast.

The *Gabonaise* was twenty-two, at the zenith of her beauty and power. She lived like a queen attended by her own servants and slaves.

Her English was as pure as Huntingdon's.

She took on his habits of cleanliness and order. She reflected him with the perfect mimicry of the savage. She was wonderfully intuitive. She knew when to speak, when to remain silent, when to steal away. She satisfied every portion of Huntingdon's sensitive, nervous, amorous being. He understood why Anthony was content with Cleopatra while Actium wrote his downfall.

Africa was no longer the cruel, the relentless. Her long wets and pitiless sun held no terrors for Huntingdon. The *Gabonaise* blotted out everything else.

She read to him. She read slowly and spelled out many of the difficult words. Her voice was sweet and low, and her pronunciation of French words *piquant* and fascinating.

He gave her everything she wished for — and more. She chose the most brilliant colors for her personal adornment, but, like flowers in Nature's uncultivated garden, the colors blended harmoniously. They emphasized the smooth, rich beauty of the woman's skin, and

enhanced her savage individuality. She was beautiful, regal, irresistible!

She had many exquisite pieces of jewelry, but the one which delighted Huntingdon most was a broad, gold anklet set with a large pigeon blood ruby, clear and alive as newly shed blood. He had the anklet made in Ashanti, and welded it on himself that it might forever adorn the curve for which it was fashioned.

He took delight in attending to business during certain hours of the day — for he never neglected it. Other times, he found companionship, a wealth of sympathy and love in the *Gabonaise*. He had long since lost sight of her color. She was his other self. He could not live without her.

He had indeed cast his lot with Africa.

Huntingdon's bungalow continued the cleanest, most homelike and attractive on the whole west coast. Huntingdon enjoyed life where the other white men simply existed. Many had come and gone during the four years: some returned to Europe, the majority a victim of Africa's malice. But LeBlanc, the French trader, Wildman, the Swiss, little Sadler, and Moore, were left.

While the servants of the other white men robbed their masters and neglected their duties, Huntingdon's goods were guarded by Mbèga and his servants kept up to the mark by the watchful *Gabonaise*.

When stray guests came from European steamers and accepted Huntingdon's hospitality, the *Gabonaise* remained out of sight. She never thrust herself forward. Not an article belonging to a woman betrayed her presence.

Had Huntingdon and the black woman been united

by the bonds of Holy Church, he could not have been more faithful to her, nor more solicitous of her honor or comforts.

The *Gabonaise* was hated by the *Ouroungoes*, especially the women, and coveted by all white men who saw her.

The latter quarreled with Huntingdon for permitting the *Gabonaise* to continue in the dress of her people. They said it was bold to see her parading about with undraped neck, shoulders and arms. But Huntingdon saw no immorality in her retention of the only drapery she ever knew. In his eyes that which is natural is neither immoral nor immodest.

The white men could not say wicked enough things against the *Gabonaise*. They prophesied Huntingdon's betrayal at her hands; they repeated to him all sorts of gossip.

But jeers, jibes and gossip hadn't any effect upon Huntingdon. He believed in the *Gabonaise*, he trusted her, he was faithful to her.

Huntingdon lived an Utopian existence. Civilization and the other life seemed so far away that it had no existence. The white woman who had caused him suffering and perpetual exile was forgotten.

Huntingdon was transcendently happy. He loved, he was loved; he trusted and his trust was reciprocated.

But change is the order of nature, and change was at hand.

The silvery rays of a full and brilliant moon enhanced the witchery of the equatorial African night.

The waters of Lopez Bay chanted a rhythmic cadence, which, borne on Night's gentle wings, pulsated o'er the

earth, while Venus, seductively tender in all the glory of her majestic ascendancy, stole the vigor from the arteries of men and left therein the languorous sweet-ness of desire.

The narcotic of love was everywhere. It hid in the graceful, drooping fronds of the giant cocoanut-palms, whose very life depends upon the sandy soil that marks the ocean's path and the salty mist of its waters. It lurked in the short, stubble, sun-burned grass, which against the sand's opposition fought a daily battle for existence. It slumbered in the broad, dull-green foliage of the motherly mango tree, whose fruit needs the passionate embraces of Africa's sun to charm it into maturity. It permeated all things animate and inanimate. It created a veritable Lotus-land wherein man and beast, bird and insect succumbed to its irresistible enchantment.

On the roomy, comfortable veranda overlooking the bay, Huntingdon and LeBlanc, the French trader, lounged in great, easy Madeira chairs.

For an hour the men exchanged no words. They were enthralled by and enchanted with the witchery of it all.

Finally Huntingdon sighed:

“A divine night, LeBlanc, a night for love. What can be more delicious than Africa at this moment? No other land in the world is like it — nowhere else are the heavens such a blue-black hue, the planets so brilliant and so near, the stars so like the eyes of the woman we love: living, palpitating, intense!”

Huntingdon stretched himself, lazily.

There was another silence.

O'erhead the giant cocoanut-palms swayed to and fro, gently brushing the roof of the bungalow.

"The music of a woman's skirts," sighed LeBlanc, glancing upward. "Shall I ever hear it again, in civilization?"

"Regrets on a night like this! Ah, LeBlanc. Open wide your senses. Breathe in the delights of this Lotus-land. Hold the caressing hours while you may. They will not always last. Isn't your mistress adorable, all you desire in women?"

LeBlanc did not answer.

"Look at Venus, old man. Is she not transcendentally beautiful? In such contrast to cold, proud Diane. Stateliness is all right — at a distance — but give me Venus. She radiates life, desire. Diane is so cold, unresponsive. Zeus! what must life be tied to an unresponsive woman, eh, LeBlanc? A creature *sans* soul, *sans* emotion, *sans* everything ardent man desires. Give me intensity, LeBlanc, throbbing, passionate expression, all entralling! Ah, they are mine, LeBlanc, they are mine!"

LeBlanc lighted a cigarette and quoted indolently:

"*Those whom the gods would destroy, they first blind.*"

"Croak, you old frog — 'tis but a confession that something's wanting in your love-palaver. Satisfied love never croaks. It exults, it glories. For satisfaction means love requited, and where ardent natures meet in full flood time, there alone is paradise."

LeBlanc leaned far back in his *chaise longue* and gazed at the stars.

"My dear Huntingdon, some women, like some stars,

are so brilliant they blind. Think you that man can look unceasingly upon love's burning flame without losing the keenest edge from his perceptions?"

"He might have to close his eyes, friend LeBlanc, the flame might be so intense. But love would have so finely attuned his other senses, that sight would not be missed. But, please, don't croak on a night like this, you old frog. Again let me counsel you to throw wide open the valves of your senses. Breathe in the soft, languorous seduction of the moment. Oh, African nights, so infinitely tranquil, yet so palpitatingly intense!"

"Bah," and LeBlanc let fall the cigarette from his lips.

"Confess, old man, isn't Africa just now surcharged with love, with desire, with seductive witchery?"

"The appreciation of nature's beauties depends upon whether or not your senses are kept satisfied."

"Ah, ha, LeBlanc, you're not such a croak, then, as you would have me believe. Seven years ago it was you who were the voluptuary, throbbing with intensity—"

"And you drew away disgusted. You—"

"I know, LeBlanc. How you old coasters must have laughed at me! I don't wonder you left me to go it alone. I was a silly ass. I imagined I could dominate throbbing, passionate Africa with cold, English will. I was punished for my folly — don't think for a moment I wasn't. But don't let's talk of unpleasant things. See how the full, tropical moon idealizes everything! The sand is as a thread of silver, a path in the land of heart's desire—"

"It's filthy, stinking, filled with jiggers—"

"The air, how soft, balmy, it is a breath of Ar-cady—"

"It's fever-laden, dangerous—"

"The waters, how softly they murmur, like Undines longing to escape to the arms of their lovers—"

"Crying to escape treacherous sharks, you mean. Yes, I grant you, our senses rule us. We can read poetry in mud and slime if our senses are satisfied."

"You'll admit, too, won't you, LeBlanc, that this languor is sweet, this somnambulance seductive? That Africa *is* the land of heart's desire, of sensual delights, an Eden of intoxicating splendor!"

The Frenchman made no response.

Huntingdon drew a long breath and closed his eyes. Again languorous silence fell, and both men lay outstretched upon their low, comfortable chairs. Abruptly, Huntingdon jumped up.

It was a sign of dismissal to the Frenchman.

"Sit down, Huntingdon, there's something I've got to say to you!"

LeBlanc's command was so peremptory, so unexpected, so out of keeping with the time, the place, that Huntingdon was startled into obedience.

Yet he could not come out of his Lotus-land without some protest.

"Ah, LeBlanc, there is never an Eden without its serpent; never a gladsome dawn without its night; never a tranquil hour without its tempest; never harmony, but discord must creep in. But can't the matter wait until some other time? To-morrow, for example, in the full glare of the pitiless sunlight, when realities are real and dreams do not float abroad?"

"No, it can't wait," LeBlanc answered, harshly.

"Out with it then, old man. Let's have it over and done with." And Huntingdon resigned himself to listen to some gossiping tale.

"It'll soon be out — but, as to its being over and done with — that rests — with — you."

LeBlanc looked closely at Huntingdon.

A peculiar numbness crept over the Englishman. The revelation had to do with Ndio. Nothing else could affect him so strangely, so vitally. Heretofore he had manifested such displeasure at any mention of the *Gabonaise* that for some time no complaints against her had reached him. Were those complaints to be revived? Must he again silence them?

"Go on, LeBlanc," he said in a low, tense tone. "But take care. If you attack anyone belonging to me, you attack me, and when you attack me, I defend myself. Africa has taught me to strike swiftly and surely. You're warned, now go on."

The Frenchman bent low over the table and looked straight into the eyes of the Englishman.

The night was as bright as day. Plainly visible were the expressions on the faces of both men.

There was a pause — a slight pause. It emphasized the more what the Frenchman was about to say.

"Huntingdon, I'm damned if I stand by any longer and see the *Gabonaise* make a fool of you!"

He spoke confidentially, as a man sure of himself and the truth of his statement.

But Huntingdon had heard LeBlanc speak so before; he was known as the most vituperous gossip in the entire French Congo. Huntingdon also recalled his suspicion

that it was LeBlanc who had written Marjorie causing her to cast him off, which suspicion Huntingdon had never hinted to LeBlanc; he would not give him that satisfaction. Nor did anyone in Cape Lopez know that Huntingdon had been jilted. They thought he had succumbed to Africa and could not tear himself away from its freedom and license. But Huntingdon had suffered enough from LeBlanc. He would silence him once and for all. He would listen to no further slander against the *Gabonaise*. She was his, his was the duty to protect her, to see that she was respected.

"Look here, LeBlanc," he said grimly, "you are my guest and I owe you deference, but I will not permit you to slander the *Gabonaise*. She has proved herself worthy of my trust in her. You will offend me past forgiveness if —"

"I'll have to offend you then, friend Huntingdon," LeBlanc interrupted, "for I don't intend to stand silently by and see you sold out for a *nigger*!"

Before that unexpected term of opprobrium, and all that men, white and black, consider vile, Huntingdon sharply recoiled, stung to the very quick, then he arose and leaned over the Frenchman threateningly.

"Take care, LeBlanc, men have bitten the dust for a less insult than that; take care!"

Huntingdon's voice vibrated with suppression, and his eyes blazed dangerously, but the Frenchman arose, faced Huntingdon, and said coolly:

"Call the *Loango*!"

Again Huntingdon recoiled. The *Loango*, a slave, a menial, his cook, and his adored *Gabonaise*! Ah, such a thing could not be true!

"You lie, LeBlanc," he cried nervously. "You know you want me to discard the woman that you might gain her. Take your tales elsewhere. I never again want you to cross my threshold — never again speak to me."

The Frenchman was never so *débonnaire* as he answered:

"Heroics are all right, Huntingdon, in defense of a woman of the proper sort, but, man, you are not dealing with a civilized woman, with a woman of refined feelings. You've to do with the savage. Some of them may be beautiful and all of them are more or less intense, yet they are ignorant of sentimental emotions. They are all animal, carnal. No matter what brutes we white men might become, we are not brute enough for black women. This woman has sold you out for a *nigger*. It's up to you whether you stand for it, or not."

Huntingdon took the wrist of the Frenchman in a grasp of iron.

"If you're lying, LeBlanc, I'll kill you."

The Frenchman shook him off.

"I don't care a damn for your threats. I'll take all that's due me if I'm lying. Call the *Loango*!"

Three sharp, furious blasts rang out from Huntingdon's whistle.

The Englishman waited, grim, silent.

The Frenchman *nonchalantly* lighted a fresh cigarette, poured out some absinthe, and muttered lightly:

"*Toujours les femmes; toujours le même chose.*"

The *Loango* slouched on to the veranda, and the Frenchman commanded sternly:

"*Loango, tell your master about the Gabonaise!*"

Taken by surprise the *Loango* groveled on the floor.

Never before did he appear so mean, undersized and repulsive.

"Get up, slave," thundered the Frenchman, kicking him in the face.

The *Loango* slowly staggered to his feet, but fear held him mute.

LeBlanc hit him savagely between the eyes with his closed fist.

The slave brushed away the spurting blood and opened his mouth to speak, but he was so slow, that LeBlanc raged:

"Tell your master whose woman them *Gabonaise* be?"

"Him be mine," the wretch faltered.

"How long she be so?" relentlessly demanded the Frenchman.

"Since last dry season ketch."

The Frenchman spat disgustedly, then demanded of Huntingdon:

"What think you now of *la belle Gabonaise*, your fine queen, your *Circe noire*?"

Huntingdon made no answer.

The soul within him died. He was as a thing without power — save to feel the acutest agony that ever seared a sensitive nature. The blood left his heart drop by drop, each drop a hotter iron burning deeper into his very being. As a thing of stone he stood in the moonlight — an inanimate pillar, its interior being slowly done to death!

The Frenchman kicked the *Loango* and sent him flying from the veranda into the sand.

The slave hugged closer the earth — not because of any new blows that might descend upon him from the

nervous Frenchman, but at thought of the punishment that would come from his pale, silent master. He died a thousand deaths awaiting the descent of his death-blow. He was sure the Englishman would take his life.

With an effort, Huntingdon pulled himself together.

“Thanks, LeBlanc,” he said, dismissing the Frenchman.

“Don’t mention it, Monsieur Huntingdon. Had it been a white man I never would have told you. But I won’t let you be sold out to a *nigger*.”

The Frenchman went up the beach, whistling.

“Come!” and Huntingdon motioned the *Loango* out into the moonlight.

The wretch slinked after him.

CHAPTER XXII

IN her bamboo house, at the forest's edge, and outstretched upon a soft blanket of brilliant silk and wool, lay the *Gabonaise*, sensuously relaxed and with closed eyes. At her feet was curled a young gazelle; at her head on a great crosstree of curiously wrought teak wood was perched a gorgeous peacock; on the back of an ebony chair a gray parrot dozed.

The *Gabonaise* would have tempted the most austere anchorite had he gazed upon her there in all the glory of her compelling, regal beauty. Mahomet's Paradise never possessed a more ravishing *houri*, nor was a sultan's *seraglio* ever more sensuously lighted, warmed and perfumed.

Priceless silken Mohammedan prayer rugs were artistically draped with the simple dull-gold raffia cloth of the equatorial jungles. A light, airy calabash stood side by side with a great leather water bottle from the Sahara. On a huge leopard's skin, soft and beautifully spotted, was carelessly thrown a rich, dark shawl of finest cashmere. On a native carved ebony *tabouret* were Turkish coffee cups of gold and a tiny silver Japanese pipe. Over a large oval mirror of wrought brass were hung the ugly charms of the witch-doctors of the negro savages. Woodland odors blended with musks from Araby. Bush lights in arabesque sconces spluttered gayly, sending forth a sweet, pungent incense,

and in a low brazier a charcoal fire burned. Decadent, hampered civilization was artistically blended with the freedom and savagery of the equator.

One by one, the bush lights spluttered hysterically, then went out. There was left only the soft glow from the brazier, tingeing the surroundings a seductive red.

Suddenly, the *Gabonaise* shivered.

Slowly she opened her glorious eyes.

Indolently, she stretched her matchless limbs beneath their soft, clinging drapery.

After a time, she arose.

Languidly, she leaned over the brazier. From her *pagne* she took a small, jeweled mirror, and examined her face by the fire's softening glow.

No antimony shaded her eyes; no carmine reddened her lips; no henna dyed her nails. She did not need borrowed charms. Nature had molded her perfectly and Huntingdon had polished her.

She arranged the ropes of brilliants, topazes and turquoises about her neck.

She played with her bracelets, rings and anklets.

She studied the great toe of her left foot, on which was a flat pigeon-blood ruby encircled with blazing diamonds.

She had not the slightest idea of the value of the jewels the white man lavished upon her. She knew only the envy they excited in other women.

Tired with play, the *Gabonaise* returned to her couch. But the spirit of unrest possessed her.

Again she arose.

As she passed the brazier, a piece of glowing charcoal leaped forth and hissed like a venomous serpent.

She drew back, affrighted at the evil omen, and, groping about in the shadows, she found a *fetish* — a tiny gazelle horn filled with pungent vegetable matter. Closing her eyes, she bent over the charm; she implored its protection from any danger that threatened, then, about her neck adorned with jewels from decadent Asia, she hung the ugly charm of the negro savage!

Despite the cold season, the *Gabonaise* wore only a *pagne* of soft, shimmering pale green satin embroidered with seed pearls. Huntingdon had it made especially for her in Constantinople. He had no other use for his wealth than to spend it for the adornment of the woman he madly worshiped — the woman who kept his senses lulled, who kept Africa masked, who made his existence an Arcadia.

The *Gabonaise* went to the door, but the chill night air caused her to shiver; she sought a soft, silken scarf and draped it about her shoulders.

The moon was so brilliant and so near that night appeared as a silver day. Plainly visible were the rippling waters of Lopez Bay and the thread of sand along the beach. All nature was subdued, entrancing, enticing, but the woman neither saw nor felt it. Something else occupied her thoughts. She was as still as the very doorpost itself. Yet her blood was in a tumult. She had but one desire: to rush forth and demand the reason of Huntingdon's silence, his neglect of her. It was the first time he had ignored her and her savage blood seethed at the thought.

Her eyes were upon Huntingdon's bungalow. But no sign of life came from it.

From the heavens she read the hour. Ten o'clock.

Already an hour beyond the time of her usual summons!

Extraordinary!

She knew LeBlanc dined with Huntingdon. LeBlanc.
Umph!

No longer could she remain inactive.

Nervously, she strode back and forth, like a wild thing caged and restless.

Must she, the imperious *Gabonaise*, be made wait like a common *Orouongo*, like the mistresses of other white men!

Rage, resentment, flooded her being. In her mad pace she stumbled over something. She stooped to pick it up; she uttered a cry of abject fear and flung the thing far from her.

It was a rotted banana stalk. A most evil omen!

The woman fell limply to the sand. Gone was her imperiousness — she was an abject, cowering, superstitious savage.

She wildly implored her *fetish* to protect her. She promised offerings of crocodile eggs and palm wine to *Abambou*, the devil who threatened her.

Suddenly a sharp whistle cut the still night.

The *Gabonaise* eagerly started forward, then stopped. Three blasts instead of two rang out!

'Twas the summons for Makaya, the Loango cook!

Slowly the *Gabonaise* retreated within her house. Mechanically she groped in the shadows and sank on an *ebongo*¹ of carved ebony.

What did Huntingdon want of the Loango at that hour of the night?

¹ Tabouret.

The cook's duties were not only long since over for the day but never before had she known Huntingdon to summon him. She, Ndio, commanded his household servants.

Suspicion, garnished by superstitious fears, unnerved her.

She arose abruptly.

Again she looked into the night, tightly clutching the *fetish* and muttering charms in the *Gabonaise* tongue.

Her brows were drawn together in thought, and her eyelids fluttered. Something unusual for her.

At last she forced herself to acknowledge the truth:

What if her liaison with the Loango were discovered?

Savage though she was, she knew Huntingdon would never forgive infidelity with white men, what then would he do to her for seeking a *nigger*!

At thoughts of personal punishment, the imperious blood of the unconquered *Mpongwès* regained its sway. The eyes of the *Gabonaise* glistened evilly, her fingers worked convulsively. One evil emotion after another chased across her features.

Let her enemies beware! She knew how to punish!

Who were her enemies?

Not Makaya nor any other native. Neither he nor they would dare betray her; they knew too well the far-reaching power of the *Mpongwès*, their swift, sure vengeance. No, she had nothing to fear from her own race. Some white man had done this thing.

She heard LeBlanc's whistle as he proceeded up the beach.

LeBlanc? She always hated the puny, insignificant Frenchman, as all well-developed women hate undersized,

effeminate men. But now she hated him with the venom of a treacherous woman betrayed. Woe be to him!

Already her cunning mind mapped out his destruction. His doom was sealed!

After what seemed an eternity, two sharp, shrill whistles came vibrating through the night.

Her summons, and *so peremptory!*

The cunning of her ancestry awoke in her, and to her came all the arts of a seductive woman.

She who was all suspicion, fire underneath, glided softly, gracefully across the moonlit stretch of sand leading to Huntingdon's bungalow.

The breath of night was stilled. All nature seemed asleep, drugged by the witchery of tropical, mysterious Africa.

Secure in her beauty and its power, the *Gabonaise* was again the imperious belle of the coast from Dakar to Saint Paul de Loando; the coveted of all white men; the envied of native women; the acknowledged wife of Huntingdon, the proud Englishman!

Huntingdon would not dare harm her. He might cast her forth. What of that? The governor of the colony had again looked covetously upon her when he passed down the coast. When he came north she would go with him to Libreville, where dwelt the *Gabonaise*, her people.

She was tired of the ignorant *Ouroungoes*, of the insipid white men. Yes, she was tired of the *Anglais*, of his indulgencies, of his kindnesses and his attentions. She had loved him more had he beat her and placed a guard over her. But he gave her freedom and unremitting love — he was weak — she hated weak men!

She sought Huntingdon's sleeping apartment.

It was flooded with moonlight which played upon a small dark object on the floor.

The *Gabonaise* stooped and picked up the thing!

'Twas an ebony idol!

Would evil omens never cease?

She spat on the head of the idol, rubbed her *fetish* over it, muttered charms, then carefully placed it on a shelf.

She lighted a *photophore*.¹

Disclosed was a man's room, cool, clean, severe. The only thing therein speaking of other climes was a handsome brass traveling clock in a dull-red morocco leather case embellished with a coat of arms in gold filigree.

The *Gabonaise* threw the scarf from her, and examined herself before a mirror. Fascinated by the reflection of her many jewels, she turned herself about to get the full effect of their sparkle; then with a quick movement, she undid the knot that held her *pagne* in place. It fell to the floor, disclosing Turkish trousers of soft, pink silk. These she also unloosed, and revealed was a Venus in mahogany draped in jewels which glistened warmly in the candle's light.

Suddenly, she sniffed vigorously.

Perfume! The strong perfume of commerce. Ma-kaya loved it. So did she. The white man detested it.

She must erase all trace of it.

She hastily removed her jewels, sought Huntingdon's bath and bathed. Vigorously she rubbed her flesh with a huge Turkish towel, dusted her body with *poudre de riz* and deluged herself with violet water.

¹ A shaded candle.

She sniffed again. She was satisfied.
But where was Huntingdon?
Strange this silence, his absence —
And those evil omens —
Danger threatened — she became thoroughly terrified — she sank on the edge of the bed and waited — waited for she knew not what save that it meant harm to her!

Suddenly two sharp, shrill whistles again tore through the tense stillness of the night!

Her summons — what was she to do, where was she to go —

Two more blasts rang out — but they electrified her into action. Huntingdon was in danger, out there in the night!

He was calling her, he needed her — danger threatened him.

She grabbed a Winchester from the wall.

Undraped, she rushed into the night.

She followed the direction of the whistle calls.

The fire of the watch blinded her as she rushed past, but on she sped.

She collided with a man.

"Twas Huntingdon.

She dropped the gun; she held out her arms to him, but drew back sharply. It was not the tender Huntingdon, she knew: Huntingdon, the lover, but Huntingdon, the master: a cold, tall, pale man clad in white.

Huntingdon spoke no word. He pointed to the *Loango*.

Makàya, short and ugly and thoroughly frightened, trembled as with the ague. In his hand was a *chicotte*,

the whip of twisted hippopotamus hide so dreaded by the natives.

The evil omens had all come true! Huntingdon knew of her *liaison* with the Loango!

She made no effort to deny. She would submit to punishment. Afterwards, revenge was left her!

Huntingdon indicated a coil of bush-rope which lay at the base of a great cottonwood.

The *Loango*, tremblingly, stooped to pick it up, but, e'er he could bind her, the *Gabonaise* proudly walked beneath the tree and leaned lightly against its silvery trunk, then, as though disdaining the tree's support, she moved a pace from it, folded her arms behind her, and posed as a queen about to receive a crown.

The flames from the watch's fire, not twenty feet away, discovered the matchless body of the *Gabonaise*; they reveled over its surface, throwing its black sensuous curves into bold relief against the silver trunk of the tree's huge girth.

Easily and gracefully the *Gabonaise* awaited her punishment. Her perfect teeth gleamed beneath the short upper lip that could not hide them. Her eyes sought Huntingdon's with an expression he knew well—an expression of voluptuous tenderness. Yet there was no entreaty in her gaze. A *Gabonaise*, an *Mpangwè*, knows neither fear nor entreaty!

Makàya never once glanced at the woman; his eyes were riveted upon his master, awaiting his commands. But he seemed so slow in delivering them that the *Loango* grew nervous and longed to escape.

At last, Huntingdon made a gesture for Makàya to throw away the rope.

Makaya was relieved. A *Loango* and a slave, he feared to bind the imperious *Gabonaise*! He knew he would have penalty enough to pay for his involuntary part in her punishment!

A heavy quiet reigned. The flames grew tired of their sport and stole away. The moon fled beneath the western horizon. Venus, at the first act of the tragedy had sought her couch. Her eyes gaze only on love and its pleasures; the consequences thereof, its tragedies, interest her not. Blackness covered the earth.

Suddenly a thousand tongues seemed loosed in protest against the punishment of the peerless beauty.

From the bay a fresh breeze sprung up. Set in motion were the great branches of the tree under which the *Gabonaise* stood. Set in motion, too, were the leaves of the trees in the forest just beyond. A sad monotone was their remonstrance. Even the birds, beasts and reptiles were startled into involuntary expression. A night owl screeched, a bush pig grunted, a huge saurian snorted at the water's edge. A bat flew into the watch's low fire and fell to the earth, suffocated.

Suddenly a harsh bell rang out!

The watch, intent only on his vigil, sounded the hour, and replenished his fire with dry bamboo.

The tension was eased.

The flames with renewed life leaped forth greedily, and, again seeking out the beautiful undraped body of the *Gabonaise*, they sported over its polished surface.

Again Huntingdon was forced to gaze upon the woman, her beauty, her grace, her proud indifference to punishment.

Suddenly, he gave harsh command:

“Twenty-five.”

Makaya, the slave, hesitated.

Flog the imperious *Gabonaise*! He might as well kill himself. Oh, if he could only escape in some manner! His eyes sought the bush, he commenced to mutter. He could not lash this woman! She would kill him sure!

“Obey, slave!” came the stern command of the *Gabonaise* in the *Orouongo* tongue.

Makaya was startled into obedience. He laid on vigorously. The flames followed each stroke of the *chicotte* as it cut deep into the body of her who all her short life had known naught but caresses. Again and again was mutilated that sensitive flesh cleansed twice a day in the sea’s soft water and polished until it shone like roseate mahogany; that flesh the delight of him who commanded its mutilation by the wretch who had dared desecrate it!

The tender flesh broke. The blood, over which the woman’s iron will had no control, ran down her body and buried itself in the unresisting sand.

Involuntarily the *Gabonaise* changed her position. A stroke paralyzed the sensitive nerves in her left elbow. The arm dropped to her side. Yet the smile still caressed her lips; easy, upright, graceful remained her body.

Her matchless breasts had not yet felt the *chicotte*’s bite. Thoughts of his own punishment caused the *Loango* to grow dizzy. He struck wildly. The breasts gave up their blood!

The eyes of the *Gabonaise* flashed wide open, her head

reared, as does a spirited charger's who resents the prick of his master's spurs.

Eleven strokes had descended.

At sight of the blood trickling from her breasts, Huntingdon cried:

“Stop!”

“Go on, slave!” commanded the *Gabonaise*, imperiously.

Huntingdon could endure no more.

He turned and fled to the bungalow.

The *chicotte's* hiss followed him. He felt the pain of every stroke. It were as though he and not the *Gabonaise* were being punished.

He rushed into his bedroom and stumbled over an ebony *tabouret*. He sent it flying through the open window.

He tripped on the clothing of the *Gabonaise*. That too went a-flying.

He stumbled over a chair. He tore off its canvas and broke the stout frame as though it were sticks of frail bamboo.

He raged, he fumed, he blasphemed.

He was furious with himself. He was caught in the web of his own weaving. He had clothed the *Gabonaise* with all the virtues he desired in the woman he loved.

He had acted the human where the brute should have ruled!

The *Gabonaise* was what she was because she was. He hated himself for the web of deceit his senses had weaved about her. He had been warned, but, secure in his conceited judgment, he took the warnings as lies, slanders!

He tasted to the full the degradation that had come upon him. He did not spare himself.

Then he raged against women.

White or black, they were all alike. *Delilahs* robbing man of his greatest strength, the strength to do and dare engendered by woman herself!

He vowed to cast women from his life. Whoso said that they had a spark of divine in them lied miserably, so that more suckers might be taken in.

Women were hell's flame, sent abroad to torture men.

Women! He hated the very sound of the word. He would abjure them forever!

Then his mood changed.

Why shouldn't women be made suffer as he had suffered? They had played with and tortured him, he would play with and torture them. For every hurt he suffered, they should suffer, for every tear he had shed, they should shed three-fold. Oh, he would show these women who their masters were! He would have a *harem* of women. They should be slaves, he the master — cold and indifferent and heartless as a Turk. He would crush out the civilization within him. He would lead such a life of debauchery that even the savage women would beg his mercy. Women had killed his better nature, they should feel the brute they had brought into being!

He blew a dreadful blast upon his whistle.

Ngumbè came in terror.

“Find me the youngest and prettiest *Orouongo* woman at once and bring her here!”

Ngumbè hastened to obey.

As Huntingdon had formerly delighted in thoughts of

the highest, now he took satisfaction in contemplating acts of the basest. He would torture and slay as he had been tortured and slain. He would out-savage the savage!

A girl of fourteen, lithe and graceful, stood before him.

“ You sent for me, O Great White King,” she said in halting English, her whole personality glowing with the satisfaction, the pride, that was hers because Huntingdon, the haughty, exclusive Englishman had summoned her.

Huntingdon pulled her roughly to him, then sent her flying across the floor.

Another dreadful blast from his whistle pierced the still night.

Again came Ngumbè on the feet of fear!

“ Go give the girl a bath, Ngumbè; she’s dirty, she smells. Give her the clothing of the *Gabonaise*.”

Again the girl was before him. Any other time he would have noticed her dainty beauty. Her features had no trace of the negro, and her flesh was the color of rich cream. She was a half-caste, clean limbed, and about her was the grace, the freshness of the wild gazelle.

“ Another manifestation of hell,” Huntingdon savagely cried, spinning the girl around.

She did not understand his words. Her knowledge of English was too slight. But she knew what it was to have white men inspect black women.

She commenced to smirk, to unloose her *pagne*, when Huntingdon picked her up and tossed her roughly to the bed.

The mosquito bar was torn from its frame, but Huntingdon savagely threw it from him.

* * * * *

Finally he took the supple, unresisting body in his arms, bent the head and feet backward until they met, then, deaf to the girl's low moan of pain, he left the room, slamming the door behind him.

His violence had spent itself.

He paced back and forth in the great living-room.

Tick, tick, tick, the European clock fell loud upon his ear in the somnambulance of the night.

It revived the memories he thought he had successfully killed. They came crowding thick and fast; memories of the white woman who had thrown him over. Ah, the wound was open and bleeding! It would bleed as long as he lived. He had loved too honestly and deeply to ever forget. *Countless eternities would find him still remembering.* That was the running sore. She had forgotten, she was married; he saw it in the English papers. Doubtless happy. Happy! Some people might know its meaning, but he never.

He forgot the woman on the floor in the next room; he forgot the *Gabonaise*. He knew only his own misery. His Gethsemane was complete.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE *Gabonaise* lay face downward in the sand. Her unclothed, bruised body was unconscious of the cold breezes from the bay and the sting of the many insects feeding upon its wounds. She knew only one thing: that an *Orouongo* woman was with the man who had cast her forth! The woman would suffer, but as for the man — the *Gabonaise* knew that he was done with her forever, and she had no desire to be revenged upon him!

The vapors of night were slowly retreating before the mystery of the coming dawn, when the *Gabonaise* raised her head. Her features were Medusa-like in their frozen calm.

Out of the bungalow came the *Orouongo*, clad in Ndio's most-cherished dress, the pale green *pagne*!

The *Orouongo* sneered as she passed the *Gabonaise* — but, quick as a tigress, Ndio sprang to her feet; she leaped upon the *Orouongo*, she caught her about the neck, and, with a twist her *Gabonaise* mother taught her, she choked the girl with the very beads that adorned her throat!

The murdered girl fell to the ground, the sneer still upon her lips!

The *Gabonaise* disappeared!

The watch, unconscious of the tragedy, put out his fire and quitted his post!

The birds chatted noisily, night beasts sought their lairs, and daylight creatures ventured forth in search of food.

The sun smiled o'er the earth.

Another day had dawned on Hell's Playground!

CHAPTER XXIV

“MASTER, master,” called Ngumbè excitedly rushing into the room. “Them woman live for die. Her lay for sand so,” and the boy threw himself face down on the floor.

Huntingdon was startled and shocked.

Had Ndio killed herself? Had he been too cruel after all? Should he have taken the unsupported word of LeBlanc, the French trader? Yet Ndio had made no denial, neither had she confessed. ’Tis true the *Loango* had confessed, but such confession was made in terror of great punishment. But would the *Loango* dare lie against the *Gabonaise*, knowing as he did the far-reaching power of the *Mpangwès*, their swift vengeance upon their betrayers? Would the *Loango* risk sure death from the *Gabonaise* to escape any punishment Huntingdon might inflict upon him? No. The *Gabonaise* was guilty. Still she did not deserve death. She might have lived and gone her own way.

About the dead woman were gathered factory hands and *canoeboys* gesticulating wildly and talking rapidly.

Ndio’s name fell on Huntingdon’s ear, and the words *blood atonement*.

What had blood atonement to do with suicide? Blood atonement was exacted only when one free native killed another.

Huntingdon parted the natives, then drew back horrified, as his eyes fell upon the *Orouongo*!

"Look, Master," cried Ogula, the shootman, pointing to the dead girl's throat. "Them be proper *Gabonaise* twist. *Gabonaise* done kill the *Orouongo*!"

Huntingdon's mind worked quickly. Ndio had murdered the *Orouongo* and Ndio herself was in danger of death! Blood for blood was the native law. *Ndio would die unless Huntingdon saved her!*

No thought remained of the wrong she had done him. His one idea was to shield the woman from the rage of the *Orouungoes*. Was he powerful enough to do so? Had he gold enough to buy off native justice? The savages were firmly rooted in their practices. Blood for blood had been their law from time out of mind. Could he, a white man, hope to buy off long-rooted custom?

He listened to the speech of the *Orouungoes*.

Chief Ragundo, the murdered girl's grandfather, was trading up the Ogôwe. A canoe had already set out to tell him of the tragedy. His return meant Ndio's death.

Where was Ndio? Back there in her house, indifferent to her fate?

Huntingdon must save her. Ah, the *Nigeria* was due; she was down the coast. He had already cabled Hains to lay to for cargo. He would smuggle the *Gabonaise* aboard the ship and have Hains take her up the coast to her own people. Once with them she was safe. Chief Ragundo could not possibly return from the Ogôwe under three days. The English ship would have come and gone by then.

Other times Huntingdon had summoned the *Gabonaise*, but now he went in search of her.

She was not in her house. In the ashes of the fire lay her mirror. The ebony stool was upturned, but no other disorder shown.

"Huntingdon, Huntingdon," came Ndio's voice from the bush just beyond.

Huntingdon hurried in the direction of the call.

The bush was cool and shadowy, the path narrow and winding.

"Ndio, Ndio," he called softly. "It is I, Huntingdon; come forth, I will save you."

"Ndio, Ndio," came the mocking answer, and in a palm tree overhead was perched Ndio's parrot.

"Ah, ha, Huntingdon, *pauvre* Huntingdon," commiserated the bird as Huntingdon continued his search.

Suddenly, in the primeval depth of nature run riot, the awful, somber, brooding silence overwhelmed the white man. Fathomless, inexplorable undergrowth and overgrowth menaced and terrified him; he turned and fled into the open.

The sun beat upon his unprotected head, for in his haste he had set forth without his helmet. Its heat bored through to the very marrow of his bones, yet all its power could not drive away the chills that suddenly besieged him. Malaria was full upon him, but he heeded not her misery in the rejoicing that was his because of the escape of the *Gabonaise*. Blood atonement was too terrible to think of in connection with her!

Canoes were heading for the beach from all directions. Crowds of natives were already assembled thereon.

"Makaya, the *Loango*, him no live," remarked

Ngumbè, serving his master's coffee and fruit on the veranda. “*Gabonaise* gone too,” and the boy grinned knowingly.

Huntingdon's blood boiled within him.

Had he, the master, been the only one blind to existing conditions?

The white men would soon come, shrug their shoulders, and cry: “I told you so.” He was glad Moore and Sadler were away in the bush. That much humiliation was spared him. LeBlanc was coming now.

He pushed his way through the crowded natives, who parted sullenly. The Frenchman was nervous, unstrung, he spoke disjointedly, and about him was the odor of absinthe.

“Oh, these women, they're fiends when they're aroused. *Mon Dieu, Sacre Cœur! Tragique! Quel désaster!* *La, la!* The *Commandant* — notify him *à la moment*, before the natives tell him lies. *Mais, non, non*, I think *Monsieur le Commandant* no take action until he hears directly from you. No matter, he won't get a show at the trial of *La Belle Gabonaise*. The French know enough in a palaver of this sort to let native justice have its way. You might, *alors*, as a matter of form, ask *le Commandant* for the *gendarmes* to protect the woman!”

“The *Gabonaise* is gone — fled!” Huntingdon answered quietly.

“*Le diable!* Where did she go?”

“I don't know. Makaya's gone too.”

“*Naturellement*,” and the Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. “They're both as good as dead. The *Gabonaise* will kill the *Loango* for betraying her, and the

Ouroungoes will dispatch the woman for killing the girl.
Voilà!"

LeBlanc lightly dismissed the matter, and poured himself a draft of absinthe.

"Did it strike you, Monsieur LeBlanc that the *Loango* will tell the *Gabonaise* that it was you who betrayed her?"

Huntingdon's cruelty was deliberate. It was the first time in his life he ever wounded a guest. But Africa had strangled the old, chivalrous Huntingdon. A newer, a coarser man was in his place.

The Frenchman's terror was pitiful.

"*Mon Dieu*, 'tis true! The poison, the secret poison will get me, the poison of the *Mpangwès*. Ah, you cold-blooded *Anglais*, does it not frighten you, do you not already see me dead out there in the sand under those *cocatiers*?"

"Wait until you're dead before you cry," sneered Huntingdon, contemptuously. "Once safe away, the *Gabonaise* won't be fool enough to return to poison a creature like you."

"*Mais, Mon Dieu*, she can send! Monsieur Huntingdon, you do not appreciate the *diablerie* of these black fiends. You refuse to understand them, otherwise you would have known all along what every white and black man on the entire coast knew, that *La Belle Gabonaise* was making sport of you."

"I'll notify the *Commandant*," and Huntingdon abruptly disappeared within.

LeBlanc poured another great draught of absinthe and drank it neat.

“ Ngumbè,” he said in a low tone, “ how did them palaver go after I left last night? ”

“ Me, I no savvy,” said the *boy*, contradiction in his tones.

“ Oh, yes, you do.”

The Frenchman laid a franc on the table.

The *boy* reached for the money, put it in his cloth and spoke rapidly in a low voice, his eyes on the door.

“ When Frenchman him go for home, master him call them *Loango* for back where big cotton tree live. Then him blow for *Gabonaise*. Master him head go for him hands so,” and the *boy* dropped his head in his hands. “ Him make so for long, long time. Them *Loango* all time lay at master’s feet, him head in the sand. Them *Gabonaise* never come. Then master blow two times two times. *Gabonaise* come from bungalow all same like *bushwoman* — no cloth. Master he tell them *Loango* twenty-five for *chicotte*. *Loango* he make them whip go and master him run for house. Things for him room all make noise. I fear. Then master blow whistle hard, hard. Me, I come. Master him like beast for jungle. Him cry for the *Orouongo*. The *Orouongo* come — I go for bed. At sunup them *Orouongo* live for dead. Hush, master live! ”

Huntingdon’s letter to the *Commandant* was brief. It simply stated that a murder had been committed on his premises and he awaited the pleasure of the *Commandant* to call and report in person.

“ Ah, *Monsieur, regardez*,” cried the Frenchman. “ Here comes the *Commandant’s* mistress. She’s looking at you, Huntingdon. They all look at you, these

wenches. *Regardez encore*, here come the *Douane*'s mistress, and Gottschalk's and Wildman's. The *jolies femmes* are all out. Dressed up, too, for your benefit. Everyone would leave their owners, if you but looked at them. Bah, you cold *Anglais*, you draw the ardent woman! We Frenchmen, all fire, have no chance when you're around!"

Huntingdon remained silent.

"Ah, you *Anglais*. You speak nothing of *l'amour*. You live it not again by telling it to your friends. We Frenchmen must speak of our mistresses or we are *misérable*! Ah, you *fish*, you *CLAM*, you *STONE*! It is so. The women love you, a *frappèd* creature, rather than a Frenchman like me, who is all *fire*, *FIRE*, *FIRE*! Here come Gottschalk and Wildman themselves," he broke off suddenly, and called out gayly: "*Bon jour, mes ames! Entrez! Il fait bon ce matin!*"

"*Himmel!* these women," said Gottschalk, the German. "They ought to be all tied with thongs — can't trust one of them and nobody would think of trusting a native woman save an Englishman. A German knows better."

"And so does a Swiss," put in Wildman.

"Master, police live," warned Ngumbè.

Huntingdon arose and returned the salute of the negro sergeant.

"Monsieur Huntingdon, we have come for the *Gabonaise*, Ndio."

"She is not here," answered Huntingdon, quietly.

"We will look for her in her house." The sergeant saluted again, and, followed by his police and an excited crowd of natives, he set forth to seek the *Gabonaise*.

"The *Commandant* would not submit Monsieur Hunt-

ingdon, a white man, to a search of his house by black police," said LeBlanc significantly.

The German and the Swiss looked up.

"Can we help you in any way?" asked the Swiss of Huntingdon.

It was patent that the men believed the *Gabonaise* was hidden in Huntingdon's bungalow.

"Gentlemen, I repeat, the *Gabonaise* has disappeared."

Not a man believed Huntingdon, yet none of them gainsaid him in his presence.

Ngumbè reported that the *Commandant* was in his bureau, and would receive Monsieur Huntingdon at once!

For the first time since his killing of the leopard which had terrorized the natives, seven years ago, Huntingdon was allowed to pass without the hearty native salute:

"*Mpolo, mpolo Tata Otangani.*"

But Huntingdon did not notice the omission. He made his way hurriedly down the beach, indifferent to the crowd that followed him.

The palaver with the *Commandant* was very formal.

The *Commandant* wrote out Huntingdon's statement. It simply averred that a murder had been committed on his premises.

With a flourish the *Commandant* signed it — then laid it away to be lost.

Absinthe was ordered.

"You ought to have known, Monsieur Huntingdon, that these women are not to be trusted. You savvy, how the *Gabonaise* deserted me for you —" and the Frenchman impatiently shrugged his shoulders —" but she

came back again. After her last *rendezvous* with me she stole nearly all my clothing and gave it to her *nigger* paramour. The last time you were up at Ninga Sika and she plead illness, you were no sooner across the bay than she was off with my *chef*."

Huntingdon writhed beneath the *Commandant's* disclosures. He took draught after draught of absinthe, but said nothing.

"Now that you savvy what these women are, treat them like the dirt under your feet — change them at will. The *Consul Général* of the Congo leaves Brazzaville on the 23rd, on his way to Europe. He's bringing his mistress to me. She's a Portuguese half-cast. The woman I have now isn't half bad — why don't you take *her*?"

Disgust was again quick in Huntingdon.

"No, thanks, *Monsieur le Commandant*, I've had enough of women."

The *Commandant* laughed and playfully pinched Huntingdon's arm.

"We all say that, when the barb of betrayal first enters. But we soon forget — especially out here, midst *l'ennui* and *la tristesse*. Oh, *en passant!* I hear you've telegraphed the *Nigeria* to stand off Cape Lopez —" The *Commandant* paused, significantly. "She's liable to anchor in the night. Can you trust your men? Remember they're *Ouroungoes*, pledged body and soul to Chief Ragundo, the grandfather of the murdered girl, and the head of their tribe. I think I'd better let you have my *tirailleurs*. You can depend on them. They're *Malgash* and *Mohammedans*."

"You are very kind, *Monsieur le Commandant*, but I

assure you on the honor of a British gentleman, the *Gabonaise* has escaped."

Again the *Commandant* shrugged his shoulders.

"As to the *Nigeria*," went on Huntingdon, "I did telegraph her to put in. That was before the murder. I've a big shipment of logs ready. But I confess to you, had the *Gabonaise* been in hiding, I would have done my utmost to send her north with Captain Hains. I couldn't see the woman delivered to her enemies."

"I hope, Monsieur Huntingdon, for *your* sake that she has gotten safely away. She couldn't do so now. The alarm has gone broadcast. Cape Lopez is swarming with *Ouroungoes*. Their number will grow greater. Chief Ragundo is beloved by his people and they will help him revenge his granddaughter. Every *hectar* of Cape Lopez and the bush will be scoured for her."

"The *Loango*'s gone too."

"Ah! That means she's fled south. Perhaps Makaya's powerful enough among his own people to protect her — but I doubt it — blood for blood is the universal law of the savages. If the *Gabonaise* succeeds in getting as far as Libreville in the north, and off to the Crystal Mountains to her own tribe, she will be perfectly safe. Her father is a powerful king. I've marveled all along why she tarried here in this *triste* Cape Lopez when there is the lieutenant-governor at Libreville — a young, very attractive French gentleman — of the *haute noblesse*."

Although heavy with fever, tired and depressed, Huntingdon continued to rejoice over the escape of the *Gabonaise*.

He did not mind the swarming of the natives, their

sullen silence when he passed, their constant guarding of his premises.

He had nothing to conceal. He feared no danger to himself. Nevertheless, he would make a big cash payment to Chief Ragundo for the loss of his granddaughter. He sincerely regretted the murder, but he did not consider that he was in any way responsible for it. The old chief had repeatedly importuned him to take his women, and because he had done so, and tragedy had resulted, the old chief could do naught else than hold Huntingdon blameless.

CHAPTER XXV

THE *Nigeria* anchored during the night. She was immediately surrounded by a cordon of native canoes. The *Oroungoes* determined to frustrate any attempt to smuggle the *Gabonaise* aboard.

The *Nigeria*'s anchor had scarce touched bottom when a surf boat was lowered and Skipper Hains was rowed at once to Huntingdon's beach.

Native canoes were detailed to follow the surf boat, pickets were placed on the beach and about Huntingdon's bungalow. It was impossible for anybody to pass through the lines of the *Oroungoes* without their consent.

The skipper awakened Huntingdon from a sound sleep. He held out his broad, honest palms and cried:

“ I'm here, me lad. I crowded on every pound of steam to reach ye. It's a nasty mess, but I'm here to get ye out of it. Ye must have been all-fired mad to have murdered the *Gabonaise*, and ye're to be arrested, eh? Well, there's no French or any other foreign nation going to arrest an Englishman when there's an Irish skipper and his boat within hailing distance. As for them bally niggers outside, come on, we'll show 'em how the Irish run the gauntlet. We'll shell the whole rotten gang if we have to! ”

Huntingdon listened to the Captain's version of the tragedy, then burst out in nervous laughter.

"It's no laughing matter yet, me lad; wait until we clear the enemy's lines. Into your duds, me boy; every moment's precious. When daylight comes it won't be so easy."

"You're a jolly fine friend in need, Skipper, but gossip got mighty badly twisted this time. I didn't kill the *Gabonaise*. Sit down and I'll tell you the true palaver."

Hains listened patiently to Huntingdon's recital, then blurted out:

"I'm blooming glad, me lad, that ye didn't soil your hands with the murder of a nigger — although, mind ye, I wouldn't censure ye if ye had, for young blood is hot blood. As for woman-palaver — men will be men and niggers are niggers. Ye plunged into the pit I warned ye forinst. I'm Irish and it ain't me way to censure a friend in need. But if the *Gabonaise* is in hiding, give her to me. I'll get her away safe and sound. I'll put her off at Gaboon among her own where she'll be safe."

Huntingdon answered petulantly: "I tell you, Skipper, the *Gabonaise* has escaped. Nobody wants to take my word for it, but I assure you on my honor as an English gentleman that the woman got away!"

"That's enough, me lad. No more's to be said. But when I got your wire down the coast and heard the gossip that had come by another wire that you had murdered a native woman and all the rest of it — I swore by the Union Jack that if you were living when I got to Cape Lopez, nobody but an Irishman would take you prisoner — and that Irishman would be me.

Once aboard the *Nigeria*, you'd be as free as her hal-yards."

"You're a brick, Skipper," began Huntingdon, but the doughty captain, short, stalky and in white, with the four strips of galoon on his sleeves showing his rank, cried:

"I'm damned glad the business is finished. Day-light's here and I'm hungry as a shark."

From the veranda he sounded a sharp blast on his whistle.

"Aye, aye, Captain," answered a voice from the beach.

Hains made a megaphone of his hands and called in stentorian tones:

"Me compliments to Mr. Shale, the Chief Steward. Have him send off breakfast for two — one time."

"Aye, aye, Captain."

Ever since the captain's entrance to Huntingdon's bungalow the natives had grown in numbers. They were sure a plot was being hatched to smuggle the *Gabonaise* aboard the English ship. In the absence of Chief Ragundo, his brothers directed affairs. Their orders were positive:

"The *Gabonaise* shall not leave Cape Lopez. She shall suffer the atonement. No one can kill an *Our-oungo* and live!"

Couriers had been sent throughout the entire country summoning all the relatives of the dead woman, even unto the sixth cousins, and every hour saw them hastening to Cape Lopez. The whole tribe of the *Our-oungoes* stood as one man to avenge the death of their

kinswoman. Family disputes were put aside for the time. The unity of revenge drew the savages together.

Already levy was also being made for palm-wine, plantains, *manioc*, and gunpowder to celebrate the great festival of death. The dead woman was sure of a proper burial ceremony because of the rank of her grandfather, but the ceremony would be prolonged and more riotous because of the manner of her death.

Skipper Hains ordered the ship's hands about loading timber. Employment was offered to any Cape Lopez natives who would come forward. None complied.

Hains was anxious to return down the coast for the cargo he had passed up when he received Huntingdon's wire.

Between log rolling and lashing, and the excitement of the jabbering *Oroungoes*, pandemonium reigned on the beach.

The *Commandant* sent an orderly with a note begging the Englishman to let him know if troops were needed and to remind Huntingdon of the *Commandant's* friendship — but the Frenchman added: "If my men see the *Gabonaise* they must take her." He heavily underscored the word *see*.

Huntingdon passed the note to the skipper.

"Not a bad sort that — for a Frenchman," acknowledged the skipper.

Huntingdon assured the *Commandant* that troops were not necessary. He repeated that the *Gabonaise* was not on the premises. That he did not know where she was.

"Me lad, did ye get me those carved ivories ye

promised to order six months back?" asked the skipper.

"Yes, there are a dozen carved tusks in the store-room. Come along, I'll show them to you and you can select what you wish."

"They'll wait until after breakfast. The surf boat's putting off now. I'm so hungry I could eat *manioc*, and I hate anything the dirty natives put hand to."

"Why didn't you say you were hungry, Skipper? I would have given you some *chop*."

"What! eat tins when we've fresh stuff aboard? Not me."

The breakfast was plentiful and both men ate heartily.

They remained on the veranda in full view of the natives until eleven o'clock, when the heat commenced to stoke up and they retired to Huntingdon's sleeping-room.

"Stretch out, Skipper," said Huntingdon, "and enjoy forty winks."

"Faith and I need them," said the skipper, taking off his coat and stretching at full length on the bed. "I haven't rested a minute since I heard of your mammy palaver. Well, it's ended and I'm mighty glad of it. I've given orders to get them logs aboard as quick as possible. I'm not needed here and I'm longing to be about me business. I'll look at the ivories now and have 'em sent off, then I can rest until it's time to steam away."

Huntingdon disappeared in the storeroom beyond his sleeping-chamber.

The place was in total darkness.

He threw wide a shutter.

A flood of searching sunlight rushed in, accompanied by the heads of prying natives. They were chattering excitedly and watched Huntingdon closely.

The latter went about whistling, indifferent to their espionage. He had nothing to hide — nothing to fear!

He stooped to pick up a great carved ivory, when a warning whisper fell upon his ears, freezing the very blood in his veins!

“Huntingdon, I’m here,” came the voice of the *Gabonaise*.

“Ndio there, in that room, where the brilliant sunlight might betray her any moment!

He wanted to rush to the window, to close the shutter, but he had no control over his limbs. Power to move had left him. Yet he must act or the woman would be lost. She would not have dared utter the warning whisper had the natives not been talking wildly among themselves.

An eternity seemed to elapse before Huntingdon pulled himself together with a mighty effort.

Picking up a great tusk of ivory, he advanced towards the window.

“Here, you!”

A number of natives essayed to jump into the room.

“One’s enough. You come,” and he indicated a powerful *Ouroongo* who had one leg over the windowsill.

The fellow vaulted lightly into the room.

Huntingdon loaded the ivory onto his shoulder and commanded:

“Into that room!”

The native passed into Huntingdon's sleeping-chamber.

Complete master of himself, with slow, easy movements, Huntingdon leaned out of the window. His wide shoulders covered the window space, and the natives retreated before him.

He looked out over the black heads and remarked the growing numbers of the savages.

"You don't love your *Mpolo Tata Otangani* any more," he smiled.

There was sullen silence.

Huntingdon let the trap window fall with a bang and locked it.

"Ndio," he cried nervously, "I thought you had escaped to the bush!"

"I slipped in here when you and the others were looking at *her*."

"But that was yesterday. Why didn't you make your presence known? Why did you wait?"

He was groping about in the dark, trying to find her.

"The *chicotte*, my legs, my sides — plenty — of — blood."

Her voice was very weak.

He reached her. She lay at his feet.

"You're wounded, suffering —"

"Save me, Huntingdon, save me!"

The terror in that once proud voice pierced Huntingdon's very soul. He bent over her.

"Here, take this. I'll do my best. But don't let them take you alive."

He put a keen-edged dagger into her hand and faced

about—just as the *Orouongo* came through the door from his sleeping-chamber.

“I’ve something for you, my man,” said Huntingdon lightly in the *Orouongo* tongue, pushing the native ahead of him. “You’ve got to go out through the *chop* room. The storeroom window’s locked.”

The native grunted in recognition of a head of tobacco and passed out.

Skipper Hains lay with his eyes shut.

Huntingdon’s mind was in a whirlwind. Ndio was there, wounded, he *must* save her, but *how! how!!*

He paced back and forth.

The captain opened his eyes.

“Double up on your quinine, me lad, and take a stiff drink. Your nerves are going some. You’re the color of chalk. Malaria, eh? Rotten ailment. Come, take a run down the coast with me. A change on the ship will do you good. A severe dose of Africa just now’ll bowl you out, and mebbe for good.”

“She’s there, Skipper, the *Gabonaise* is there,” cried Huntingdon, wildly pointing to the storeroom.

The skipper jumped to his feet, grabbed his coat and buttoned it furiously.

“A pretty kettle of fish!” he ejaculated.

“I didn’t know it, Skipper, I didn’t know it until just now. I give you my word—I didn’t—”

“That’s all right, me lad, softly, softly.”

“She’s wounded, weak, suffering! She crawled in there yesterday morning when the natives and myself were crowded about the dead woman. We’ve got to save her, Skipper, we’ve got to save her!”

Huntingdon’s voice broke and he cried like a woman.

"Let the wench take her medicine. She gave it to ye pretty strong," answered the skipper, testily.

Through his tears Huntingdon plead for the woman who had so foully wronged him.

"Skipper, the *Gabonaise* saved me from death more than once. Didn't she nurse me back to life when black-water had all but got me?"

"Yes, she saved ye for herself — because she wanted ye — the brute!"

"Didn't she intercept the medicine Itula made for me when I caught him stealing from my new factory?"

"It takes a thief to catch a thief, and a murderer to trap a murderer."

"Didn't she repeatedly risk death for me by tasting every bit of my food before it came to my table?"

"Ye repaid her a thousandfold!"

"Ah, Skipper, shall it be said that an Englishman is found wanting when the test comes? Shall it be said an Englishman lacks gratitude?"

The skipper was silent.

Despair settled upon Huntingdon, and he cried:

"I'll give myself up to the *Ouroungoes*. Blood for blood is their demand. White blood is richer than black — they'll accept the substitute!"

Huntingdon was unnerved — he scarce knew what he was doing.

He started for the door.

The skipper hauled him back. Huntingdon tried to shake him off, but the skipper's grip was powerful and he raged: "When it comes to substitutes it won't be a white man and an English nobleman at that for any heathen nigger wench. So rest easy — while I think a bit."

All trace of weariness vanished from the skipper.
He was the man of action!

Huntingdon collapsed on the bed.

The skipper lighted his meerschaum and puffed vigorously.

“I presume ye can trust the *Commandant* in this affair?” he finally asked.

Huntingdon nodded.

“His soldiers, what they be?”

“*Malgash!*”

“Good.”

“You’re not going to make a bolt for the *Nigeria* with her, are you?” and Huntingdon stared wildly at the captain.

“Do I look like such a dom fool, me lad? Looks is mighty deceivin’ then. Midday — I’m hungry. Cox-un,” he roared out over the veranda.

“Aye, aye, sir.”

The natives listened sullenly as the captain shouted his orders:

“Me compliments to the chief steward. I’ll lunch ashore with Mr. Huntingdon. Send plenty of grub — some roast beef, raws eggs, some canned milk and a bottle of Hennesy!”

“Aye, aye, Captain,” the man saluted and started away but the skipper yelled, as he darted within:

“Stand-by a bit.”

He hurried to the storeroom, closing the door softly behind him. Huntingdon heard a match light. Then Hains came forth almost immediately and out on the veranda he shouted to his coxswain:

“ Mr. Huntingdon’s cook’s taken French leave. Have the boy, Iguèla, come to take his place.”

“ Aye, aye, Captain.”

Iguèla, a slender Mandigan, clad only in a loin cloth stepped on to the veranda. Hains rushed forth and laid a *chicotte* vigorously across his shoulders, bellowing:

“ Ye blue-spotted son of Ham! Don’t ye know better than to come ashore to serve me undressed like the heathen ye are? Get off to the ship, one time, and put on your clothes — all of them, d’ye hear? If ye play me a trick like that again, I’ll flog the life out of ye.”

The boy ran with all his might towards the beach, the *Ouroungoes* jeering at his discomfiture.

Again the captain yelled:

“ Send Sampson!”

Sampson, the big, powerful Kru, appeared.

The natives crowded closer — they weren’t going to be caught napping. Their suspicions of the skipper had been continually growing. Runners reported from all parts of the bush that the *Gabonaise* had not passed through. The Englishman had declared she was not on his premises but he evidently knew where she was hidden. They would watch him, and get her!

“ Sampson, how long it be before them logs be all stowed?” roared Hains.

“ Sundown, master; the surf runs heavy — it and the *Ouroungoes* keep back the work.”

“ Do you expect to keep me laying around this flea-bitten hole all that time?” raged Skipper Hains in tones loud enough to be heard away out in the bay, where his ship was anchored. “ Logs must all be stored by four

o'clock. Put more men at work and flog the interfering natives out of the way, savvy?"

"Aye, aye, Captain."

"Here's a key — take it to the first officer and tell him —" the skipper fumbled through his pockets, then began to swear. "Where in hell're my keys? Come here, Sampson, they're inside."

Away from the prying natives, the captain lowered his voice and spoke quickly:

"Sampson, if them logs is all stowed BEFORE sundown YOU GET DOCKED A MONTH'S WAGES, savvy?"

The eyes of the intelligent *Kru* and those of the Irishman met.

"I savvy, master."

"Now get to work," roared Hains, once more on the veranda and playing to the gallery. "This is a hell of a place — if my keys are lost somebody'll get it. See to it that ye have the ship scoured for them. And tell Mr. Frazer to get up steam. We leave at four o'clock. Not another minute'll I pass in this infernal hole if I go begging for cargo!"

"Is it all arranged?" asked Huntingdon, through his chattering teeth.

He lay on the bed, smothered in blankets and tarpaulins. African fever was shaking the life out of him. His temperature was high, dangerously high, his eyes unnaturally bright, and a red spot burned on either cheek. The unexpected discovery of the *Gabonaise* had completely unnerved him and fever laid him helpless.

"Softly, softly, me lad, here come grub and Iguèla."

Iguèla was clad in a white duck suit — his feet and head bare.

“ Bring the drinks and the eggs and milk in here, Iguèla. Open them brandy and do ye lay the table on the veranda and stand-by for service.”

The skipper intently watched the coming and going of Ngumbè.

The moment he was waiting for came.

The living-room was deserted.

Slamming the eggs into a glass, jamming his knife into a can of milk and grabbing the bottle of Hennesy, the skipper disappeared into the storeroom and was back again in less time than it takes to record it.

Huntingdon smiled gratefully, but made no comment.

Dinner was announced.

“ Up, up, me lad. Tough lines, but ye've got to avoid suspicion. It's well the savages are sober, else there'd be no controlling them. And if ye didn't stand in such good feather with them, it'd be worse for ye. Ye've always treated the vermin square an' honorable. They heard ye pass your word that the wench was not here — so act up to it, or Irish Hains won't answer for the consequences.”

The skipper pushed back the heavy covering and helped Huntingdon to his feet.

Huntingdon could scarcely stand upright. His head throbbed, his eyeballs burned, every joint in his body pained him, and his knees were almost bent under him.

The Irishman gave him a full tumbler of brandy, and with it Huntingdon washed down a handful of powdered quinine.

Again the meal was eaten in full view of the natives.

Every mouthful choked Huntingdon and 'twas all he could do to restrain his stomach from rejecting it.

He crowded on more brandy — natural endurance he had none.

Over the heads of the *Ouroungoes* Hains bellowed:

“ Sampson, hurry up the *boys*! No palavering over *chop*! If logs ain’t all stowed by four o’clock not a son of Ham’ll receive tuppence! ”

Iguèla was squatted on the veranda.

“ Stand-by, me lad,” roared Skipper Hains. “ I’ve got ivories for ye to take aboard.”

Inside the bedroom Hains shouted:

“ With your leave I’m going to turn in, Mr. Huntingdon. Do likewise, the heat’s infernal.”

But Huntingdon was already in bed. Fever was again shaking the life out of him.

Growling about the heat and the glare, the skipper loudly banged windows and shutters to.

The chatter without died away, as the natives sought the shade from the intense o’erhead rays of the noon-day sun.

But a strict watch was kept on bungalow and beach.

Iguèla lay snoring on the veranda.

“ For heaven’s sake, Skipper,” cried Huntingdon in a tragic whisper, “ tell me your plan and end my misery! ”

“ Softly, me lad, softly. One head’s enough to manage this business. Have you got a pair of decent clippers? ”

Huntingdon pointed to a nail on the wall.

The captain took down the clippers.

He went to the storeroom and lead out the *Gabonaise*.

She was pitifully weak.

Huntingdon hid his head and groaned when he beheld her lacerated flesh.

She was still nude.

Tenderly the skipper wrapped a great bath towel about her, and placed her in a chair. He bade Huntingdon hold a pillowcase while he clipped her hair.

Not a strand of it was permitted to fall!

Not a word was spoken!

Suddenly, the *Gabonaise* kissed the skipper's hand!

Roughly, the skipper drew away, but there were tears in his eyes!

The woman was sorely maimed! Through her lacerated sides her ribs showed; her left breast was split open and her face was swollen and distorted beyond recognition.

Huntingdon could bear up no longer!

He threw himself on the bed and sobbed convulsively!

Tenderly the skipper lead the *Gabonaise* back to the storeroom.

He held low converse with her — again and again he repeated his commands.

As he closed the door, he growled in his worst tones:

“ Damn nigger wenches’re more bother than they’re worth. But I’m Irish — Irish —”

He ignored the storm of emotion besieging Huntingdon.

He settled himself in a chair and smoked pipe after pipe.

CHAPTER XXVI

FOUR o'clock came.

Black smoke belched from the *Nigeria's* funnels.

The logs were not nearly all loaded. The skipper was on the beach swearing lustily. He wouldn't pay a nigger tuppence because of slow work! He was going to put out at once! He wouldn't delay another moment!

"Give me until sundown," begged Sampson, the *Kru*, in a loud voice.

"Until sundown then, you son of Ham, but not a second longer!" raged Skipper Hains, and Sampson, *chicotte* in hand, plunged into the surf and vigorously belabored the perspiring *crewboys*.

But the tide was coming in; the surf roared ominously, hurling spray in all directions, and impeding the lashing and towing of the timber. The *crewboys* too were exhausted and worked indifferently.

The natives were packed solid. They grew more excited as the hour for the *Nigeria's* departure drew nigh.

Along the beach the *Commandant* preceded by his police was seen approaching. The *Douane*, LeBlanc, Gottschalk and Wildman brought up the rear.

With lowered bayonets, the guard forced a pass through the throng.

The white men gained Huntingdon's veranda.

They greeted each other as though nothing were amiss.

Drinks and cigarettes were proffered and accepted.

Every action was visible and every word spoken was audible to the crowding natives.

Everything else was discussed save the matter in hand. It was ignored by tacit, mutual understanding.

Odds were laid that the logs would not be stowed by sundown. The skipper swore repeatedly that, logs or no logs, at sundown the *Nigeria* would steam away.

Although apparently the usual leave-taking when a steamer was about to leave port, each and every white man knew that a crisis was approaching. They felt it in the surcharged air; the pushing and crowding of the determined natives; in Skipper Hains' assumed bluster; and in Huntingdon's strained silence.

The *Commandant* had his mind made up. He would have no blood shed for the *Gabonaise*. He would deliver her to the *Oroungoes*. He was sorry to follow such a course, but what else could he do? His spies had warned him that the *Gabonaise* had not yet been smuggled aboard the *Nigeria*, that she had not passed through the bush, and he never for an instant believed Huntingdon's assertions that the woman had escaped. Had an attempt been made in the darkness of the previous night to get the woman aboard the English steamer, the *Commandant* would have abetted it. Hence the offer of his guard to Huntingdon. But Huntingdon persisted in declaring that the *Gabonaise* had escaped. Now it was too late — she *must be delivered to the Oroungoes!*

Huntingdon was in a sweat of agony. His physical misery was nothing compared with the agony of sus-

pense. How would the skipper ever smuggle Ndio through that watchful, vengeful crowd!

Huntingdon bent over with the weight of his woe.

The skipper gave him a terrific poke in his ribs.

“Here’s good luck to Mr. Huntingdon,” he roared. Huntingdon came to life.

“Ngumbè,” he cried, “to the factory. More brandy and absinthe!”

“And champagne,” shouted Hains.

The drinks came thick and fast. The white men grew more animated. They stood up drinking to each other’s health. They were nervous, all but hysterical. The tension was telling on them.

“Iguèla!” suddenly bawled the skipper.

The *boy* came forward.

“Heave this stale stuff overboard and bring me a clean glass!”

The tumbler was half full of brandy.

Iguèla turned towards the galley.

The skipper’s keen blue eyes followed him. His face flamed so that the blood seemed ready to burst from their arteries. The perspiration trickled through his white clothing.

Suddenly Iguèla raised the glass to his lips and drained its contents!

Skipper Hains mopped the sweat from his brow. He grew boisterous, something unusual for him. Forgetful of his dignity he danced a fisher’s hornpipe. The white men clapped their hands in time with his step. The natives looked on in stolid silence.

Suddenly the skipper resumed his dignity.

He glanced over the bay.

The sun was nearing the horizon !

Another round of drinks !

The great blood-red disc of day hovered on the water's edge, then suddenly disappeared.

A gun bellowed from the *Nigeria's* decks.

Down came the ship's flag. On the beach at the *Douane's* and the *Commandant's* flags were also lowered.

“ Sundown, by all the gods ! ” roared Irish Hains. “ Logs or no logs, off we go. Sampson, every man aboard ! Let the logs in the water go. I've already delayed too long ! ”

On board and in the water there was great commotion. Ropes were hauled in, winches withdrawn, hatches closed. The *crewboys* on the unloaded logs dived into the water ; the logs floated out with the tide.

“ Where's that Iguèla, ” thundered Skipper Hains. “ Iguèla, Iguèla ! ”

The Mandigan came slowly forward.

“ Get a move on, ” roared the Irishman. “ Don't act like a corpse. Get in there and bring out them ivories. And be quick about it. ”

He gave the *boy* a shove which sent him sprawling within Huntingdon's bedroom.

The natives edged closer together. An ominous silence reigned.

At a signal from the *Commandant*, the sharpshooters stood attention.

“ Gentlemen, ” said the skipper, and his voice rang loud and clear in the tense stillness, “ your company to dinner on the *Nigeria*. I've ordered a good spread. ”

“ To dinner on the *Nigeria*, ” cried the white men in unison, raising their glasses as one man, in a final drink.

Mechanically Huntingdon had acted with them.
The decisive moment had come.
What would happen?

The white men instinctively drew closer together. All but Huntingdon and the skipper.

Huntingdon was collapsing. Ndio was abandoned to her fate.

It was impossible, utterly impossible to smuggle her through that watchful, vengeful crowd.

She was lost!

The guards with lowered bayonets tried to part the crowd.

Only a narrow opening was essayed.

The white men would have to pass through in single file! No chance would they have to smuggle the woman with them.

The tropical night was falling quickly.

The moon was already growing bright.

The eyes of the natives like one solid battery were trained on the white men, while their hands rested on their belts and fingered long, ugly-looking knives!

Iguèla came slowly forth, his hands upraised to steady the ivories on his head.

“ Make way there! ” bellowed Hains, like an enraged bull, pushing Iguèla ahead and laying on right and left with his short *chicotte*.

The crowd closed in after them. The natives murmured sullenly. All their faculties were alert. Then someone whispered:

“ Watch *Mpolo Tata Otangani!* ”

The whisper was taken up, and, like a wave, over

the throng swept the warning: *Watch Mpolo Tata Otangani!*

“Sergeant, make way!” came the *Commandant’s* crisp command.

The *Malagasy* forced an open path.

The white men, one by one, descended to the beach.

All save Huntingdon, who was last.

The natives closed the path and he was hemmed in.

“Where is the *Gabonaise*?” someone demanded.

Then came the titanic threat:

DELIVER US THE GABONAISE!

The crisis had come!

With lowered bayonets the *tirailleurs* tried to force their way back to the Englishman.

The natives stood a solid phalanx. They budged not an inch!

The guns of the sharpshooters were leveled!

Hammers clicked!

Awaited was the command to fire!

The lives of the white men hung in the balance!

Ragundo’s brothers had expressly charged the *Ouroungoes* not to begin an assault. But once the guns of the guard spoke, not a white man would be left to tell the tale.

And every white man knew it!

Huntingdon tried to force his way back to the bungalow. He would die by the side of the *Gabonaise*.

His act *in extremis* proved his salvation.

The natives blocked behind him pushed forward. He was buffeted this way and that, but always towards the beach!

Huntingdon had his wits now. He correctly sized up the situation! He would go to the beach! It would disarm suspicion that the *Gabonaise* was in his bungalow! He rejoiced that his attempt to return to the bungalow had not betrayed the woman's hiding place!

Huntingdon squared his broad shoulders!

The full realization of his position was upon him!

His weakness had vanished! He did not care for his own life, but he could not desert the *Gabonaise*, nor would he permit the lives of his friends to be sacrificed if he could avert it.

He maneuvered so that the natives who thought to withstand him formed the rush line which made his descent to the beach possible.

He feared every moment the *Commandant's* order to fire. He knew it would be the death signal for his comrades and himself.

He longed to cry out to the *Commandant* to remain silent. But he did not wish to show fear, nor to betray his presence.

Thanks to the fever and chills consuming him, he wore a dark flannel shirt.

Right in front of him was big Ogula, the shootman. Behind him was Nkömbi Kakhi, his brother.

There seemed to be some understanding between the *bushmen*. But Huntingdon was unaware of it.

The crowd pushed and swayed, ominously silent.

From the beach rolled a tremendous threat:

"Who harms a hair of the Englishman's head shall answer to England! Cape Lopez shall be shelled and every nigger sent to hell!"

Stock-still stood the negroes. Many of them did not

understand the words, but their portent was unmistakable!

Huntingdon's danger was now greatest.

His way to the beach was completely blocked by a solid phalanx of awed natives. There had been hope before in the pushing and shoving.

A sullen growl commenced among the *Ouroungoes*.

Their patience was exhausted — the leash that held them was at breaking point.

The white men were never nearer death! The natives were mad for action, when on the surcharged air there fell a shrill cry:

“Chief Ragundo, he live, he live!”

Huntingdon was startled — now the *Gabonaise* was in for it. No power on earth could save her!

Again helplessness enveloped him.

He could neither return to her and die with her, nor go forward to his friends.

All was lost!

He would have sunk into a heap had not the dense mass held him upright.

Then over Huntingdon's shoulder reached the mighty arm of Nkömbi Kakhi! It rested on the shoulder of his brother, Ogula, the shootman!

Gently Huntingdon was forced close, close to Ogula. The three men were as one.

“Mbèga, them cry be Mbèga, master,” whispered Nkömbi Kakhi in the white man's ear.

Ah, Mbèga, the *bushboy*! Mbèga, who had declared Huntingdon to be his proper master seven long years ago, and who had served him faithfully all that time!

Courage came to Huntingdon. Let white men con-

tinue to desert him, three friends were left him: Ogula, the shootman, Nkömbi Kakhi, his brother, and Mbèga, the *bushboy*!

There was a fighting chance — Huntingdon seized it.

“Ogula, master must ketch them beach,” he whispered into the ear of the giant.

The words had scarce passed his lips e'er Ogula's mighty lungs took up Mbèga's cry:

“Chief Ragundo, he live, he live!”

“Chief Ragundo, he live, he live!” then shouted Nkömbi Kakhi in the *Orouongo* tongue.

Like a rushing wave the cry was taken up and floated out to sea!

A gentle push from Ogula started the man in front of him, and soon every native was desirous of reaching the beach.

They wanted to be on hand to greet their chief as he stepped from his canoe.

Quicker, quicker came the pace. The giant Ogula pulled Huntingdon's arms about his waist, Nkömbi Kakhi edged closer to Huntingdon. The three men as one, gained the beach, then Huntingdon made a dash as Ogula, the shootman, stepped from in front of him.

He vaulted lightly into the *Nigeria*'s life boat, from the stern of which flew the Union Jack!

“Safe on English soil, by gad!” thundered Skipper Hains, from the gunwale in front of Iguèla, who sat in the prow, the ivories on his knees.

The other white men were already in the boat, and natives were plunging into the surf from all directions.

The furious incoming tide swept over the surf boat

drenching its occupants and threatening to capsize it.

“ Cast off, one time,” roared Irish Hains, his hand on Iguèla’s head to steady himself.

It was Ogula, the shootman, Nkömbi Kakhi, his brother, Mbèga, the *bushboy*, and Sampson, the *Kru*, who obeyed the command.

The undertow caused the boat to pitch head on and its occupants were thrown into a heap. Skipper Hains fell on Iguèla and roared:

“ Sampson, the tiller!”

With one leap Sampson gained it. He threw all his great strength against it; he spoke quickly in his own tongue to his oarsmen, other mighty *Krus*, the pick of his force. Dexterously the head of the boat was kept to sea, while the angry surf combated her right of way, but slowly the boat was carefully worked out of the trough and on to the rollers!

Skipper Hains doffed his helmet and welcomed the night breeze. He sent Iguéla sprawling to the bottom of the boat and took his seat in the prow.

Out on the bay in the moonlight a sailing-canoe was driving at full speed before the stiff breeze straight for Cape Lopez. It was the sail which had prompted Mbèga’s cry and which made his ruse possible. Hence the natives made no attempt to stop the surf boat. They were confident the *Gabonaise* was not aboard. They awaited their chief — he would find the *Gabonaise*.

The *Nigeria* reached, Skipper Hains flogged Iguèla up the ladder.

“ Put them ivories in me cabin, and take your black mug out of me sight,” he bellowed.

Huntingdon brooded in silence.

The skipper had failed him. There was but one thing for him to do: to deliver himself to the *Ouroongoes*. They would have to accept him in lieu of the *Gabonaise*.

He was more determined than ever that she should not fall into their hands.

After the nervous strain of the past few hours, dinner was unusually lively.

The other white men drank too much to notice Huntingdon's absorption. He sat as one on whom the mantle of death had fallen.

"Say, Monsieur Huntingdon," hiccoughed the *Commandant*, "I owe you a million apologies. I felt sure you had hidden *la belle Gabonaise* and would attempt to smuggle her aboard good Skipper Hains' boat. Ah, what a ravishing beauty she was! *Mon Dieu*, such ardor as was hers! We know, all of us, LeBlanc, Wildman, Gottschalk —'twould be *terrible* for the ignorant *Ouroongoes* to destroy that Venus in Mahogany! To thee, *la belle Gabonaise*, I send a million embraces! May the *Ouroongoes* never see even the curve of thy divine back!"

"To *la belle Gabonaise*," came the toast and the *Commandant*, LeBlanc, Wildman and Gottschalk drank deep.

Skipper Hains was busy opening a bottle of Teneriffe wine but no one noticed his failure to respond to the toast.

As for Huntingdon, he was too miserable to care what white men did. He was done with them.

The dinner seemed endless to him.

After it was finished, Skipper Hains avoided him. Huntingdon did not care. He was hardened to desertion when he needed succor most.

Silently he followed the other white men into the canoe to go ashore.

Silently he took leave of them on the beach.

He pushed through the natives still surrounding his premises; let them guard him until Doomsday, he swore the *Gabonaise* would never fall into their hands!

The *Nigeria* pulled anchor, and steamed away.

Huntingdon bade Ngumbè close up for the night.

Apparently indifferent, Huntingdon bellowed loud for a drink and something to smoke.

Yet all the time his brain was in a tumult.

The *Gabonaise* was there, in his storeroom.

Would it be his life for hers, or had he wealth enough to buy her release from Chief Ragundo?

The old chief, himself, might be willing to accept gold, but would he, the head of his tribe, dare violate one of its strictest customs?

Huntingdon knew that Mbèga's cry was a ruse—the *bushboy* had made good at the psychological moment—but Chief Ragundo was liable to come any time. Until then Huntingdon had a part to play. He must appear indifferent to the espionage of the natives. He must show no anxiety to be alone.

Ngumbè must be allowed to roam about the bungalow as was his custom. He would not enter the storeroom. Ever since Itula had been caught thieving, no one save Huntingdon ever entered there. It was always kept locked. That it was open the night of the murder was because of the events preceding it.

So far then as immediate discovery was concerned, the *Gabonaise* was safe.

Should Chief Ragundo refuse to accept Huntingdon as her substitute, or her weight in gold, then he, Huntingdon, would murder the woman with his own hands!

“Ngumbè,” he drawled, “Chief Ragundo, he live?”

“No, master. Mbèga never see proper for him eye. He be *bushboy*”— and great was Ngumbè’s contempt —“him never see proper.”

“Yes, he be *bushboy*, *proper bushboy*,” Huntingdon drawled.

Ngumbè, not clever in interpreting tones, grunted:

“Aye, it be true, him be *proper bushboy*.”

Despite his physical weakness and the tumult in his brain Huntingdon slowly smoked his pipe and sipped absinthe.

He sauntered to the doorway.

He stood looking out into the night — he appeared reluctant to retire, yet all the time he was anxious to get to the *Gabonaise*, and his limbs could scarce support his body.

He ignored the thumping in his head, the sweat deluging him, the chills freezing the very marrow in his bones!

“Ngumbè, you fit for call master proper early when Chief Ragundo live.”

“I fit, master.”

Huntingdon waited until he heard Ngumbè talking outside with the watchers.

He heard those not on guard separate for the night.

In the dark, he loaded his Winchesters and placed them on the bed.

If he were surprised, he would kill the *Gabonaise*.

He tiptoed to the storeroom.

“Ndio,” he whispered, “come, *chérie*, you are safe.”

There was no response.

He groped in the darkness.

He fell over her body!

She was dead of neglect while those fool foreigners and renegade Irishman made merry!

As hatred for his fellow man rushed over him, into life spurted all the love he had for the *Gabonaise*.

He fell on her breast — he called her by name, he begged her to speak to him.

He didn’t care who heard him now — she was dead — dead — of neglect —

Suddenly, he jumped up —

Was he mad, raving with fever — what manner of a body lay there —

He dragged it to his bedroom —

He lighted a match —

He gazed upon the upturned face of — *Iguèla*!

He was nude as the day he was born!

Huntingdon bent over him.

Drugged!

Like a flash of blinding light the truth came home to Huntingdon.

The wily Irishman had lashed the imperious Gabonaise through the very teeth of her enemies!

Thank God, white men were still white!

Huntingdon swooned.

Nature could bear no more.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE canoe sent in search of Chief Ragundo continuously called out news of the tragedy to passing canoes and villages. The whole country thus became aroused and natives flocked to Cape Lopez. Sadler was on his way with cargo and every ounce of steam possible was crowded on the little *Oka* and she almost flew across the bay.

The *Orouongoes* thronged about him as he landed on Huntingdon's beach early the next morning, but, paying no attention to them other than shoving them out of the way, he hurried into Huntingdon's bungalow, crying:

“It's a rotten mess, old man. Why didn't you telegr—” but he stopped, for there on the floor side by side lay Huntingdon and the nude *Mandigan*!

Little Sadler had not received such a shock in many a day! At first he thought his friend was dead, but examination showed that he was unconscious and gripped by fever.

“Sunlight, Mbèga, Ngumbè, Makàya!” yelled Sadler, at the same time blowing his whistle furiously.

Only Sunlight and Mbèga responded. When the latter saw the *Mandigan*, his eyes nearly started from his head with fright and he cried:

“*Iguèla, Iguèla, he live, he live, he never go for Nigeria!*”

The startling cry rang out clear and distinct and brought the *Ouroungoes* crowding into the bungalow.

Sadler, knowing nothing save that Chief Ragundo's granddaughter had been murdered by the *Gabonaise*, turned on the savages, and, standing between the bodies of the white man and the *Mandigan*, revolver in hand, he raged:

"How dare you enter King Huntingdon's house! Get out, every one of you, or I'll pump you full of lead!"

The savages recoiled before the threat but did not retreat. Then forward stepped one of the brothers of Chief Ragundo and quietly, but firmly, he spoke:

"Master Sadler, them *Gabonaise* live for murder granddaughter of my brudder, Ragundo. It be proper native law that them *Gabonaise* be dashed to us and when my brudder, Chief Ragundo, live for Cape Lopez them *Gabonaise* shall suffer the *mboundu*!"

"What the hell do I care what you do with the nigger wench, but you'll get out of here. King Huntingdon live for sick, *mpolo*, *mpolo*, perhaps he live for ground ketch soon and I want to give him *medceen* one time!"

The *Mandigan* was slowly recovering from his stupor. As he essayed to sit up, upon him jumped an *Ouroongo* demanding in *Ouroongo*:

"Them *Gabonaise*, where he live!"

The *Mandigan*, neither understanding the *Ouroongo* tongue nor remembering how he came to be there on the floor without his clothing, knew only that he was being attacked. He grappled with the *Ouroongo* and one or the other of them would have been choked to death, had not little Sadler commanded Ragundo's

brother to separate them and tell him the cause of the palaver and he would render judgment.

The men were separated and with the unconscious Huntingdon on the floor and the *Mandigan* cowering behind Sadler for protection, Sadler listened to the events of which he was not aware.

“Me, I be Mboomba, proper brudder to Ragundo Vandji, chief of the *Ouroungoes*—”

“I know your pedigree,” Sadler cut in. “I’ve no time now for *mpolo* palaver! *Negesa!* and tell me for why you make murder palaver on Iguèla?”

Mboomba, paying no heed to Sadler’s command, attempted to continue in the usual, roundabout way of the savage, but Sadler cut him short and demanded of Mbèga, if he knew the cause of the palaver.

“I savvy, master,” answered the boy promptly.

“*Negesa*, then, out with it!”

“Them *Gabonaise* live for murder them granddaughter of Chief Ragundo—”

“For Christ’s sake I savvy that,” cried the nettled white man, eager to be rid of the negroes so that he might give attention to Huntingdon, but at the same time fully aware that it would precipitate bloodshed did he not at once do away with the palaver between the *Ouroungoes* and the *Mandigan*. “What them *Mandigan* do, Mbèga, that’s what I must savvy?”

“He never go for *Nigeria*, yet me and all them *Ouroungoes* look him go with ivories for him head—Master Hains drive him so for beach—he put him so for surf boat—me I look him so—all them *Ouroungoes* look him so—them surf boat he make for the *Nigeria* one time, me, Mbèga, and Ogula, the shootman, and

Nkömbi Kakhi, him brudder, and all them *Ouroungoes* look him —”

“ Who? ”

“ Iguèla, the *Mandigan*. ”

“ What’s wrong with Iguèla carrying ivories for *Nigeria*? He be proper *cabinboy* for Skipper Hains. ”

“ It be true, Master Sadler, and Mbèga no savvy how them *Mandigan* live for *Nigeria*, them *Nigeria* steam ‘way one time and them *Mandigan* now live for here! ”

Light was breaking on the white man.

“ Them *Gabonaise* after him murder them *Ouroungo*, where him live? ”

“ Master Huntingdon say him gone for bush; *Commandant* him send *Malgash* for tek them *Gabonaise*; them *Gabonaise* no live for him house for back, me, Mbèga, and Ogula, the shootman, and Nkömbi Kakhi, him brudder, and all them *Ouroungoes* never look him no more, he no live! ”

“ Where’s Makàya? ”

“ After him give *chicotte* for *Gabonaise*, he no live. ”

“ Makàya give *chicotte* for *Gabonaise*! ” and Sadler was genuinely astonished that anyone should lay violent hands on the precious Ndio. “ For why Makàya he make so? ”

“ *Gabonaise* be him woman! ”

Sadler drew in his breath and thought a moment — more light was dawning upon him.

Along with the other white men, he never trusted the *Gabonaise*. He knew she would betray Huntingdon some day; that day had come; Makàya was the man; Huntingdon had had him flog the *Gabonaise* — but where did the *Ouroungo* woman come in?

“After Makàya flog them *Gabonaise*, King Huntingdon what him live for do?” Sadler next demanded of Mbèga.

“Him blow for Ngumbè; Ngumbè him brought them *Orouongo* for King Huntingdon’s woman; next day sunup them *Orouongo* live for die, them *Gabonaise* put him twist for him throat!”

So the *Gabonaise* in jealous rage had killed the *Orouongo*!

“And them *Mandigan*, what him live for do, Mbèga?”

“I no savvy — he live for *Nigeria*, he no live for *Nigeria* — *Nigeria* live for go, *Mandigan* he live here.”

Sadler waived Mbèga aside, then called the *Mandigan*. But Iguèla feared to come forth.

“Never fear, Iguèla,” said Sadler, kindly. “Tell master true palaver, *Orouongoes* never touch your skin, master shall keep you safe.”

Encouraged and from where he stood the *Mandigan* spoke:

“Master Sadler, Iguèla come for get them ivories for Master Hains, Iguèla go for storeroom — Iguèla be sick for him head, he stagger for floor — it be all dark — someone he ketch Iguèla for neck — Iguèla never look him — Iguèla never savvy nothing ‘till just now —”

“That’ll do, Iguèla, Master Sadler savvy all them palaver proper now,” and addressing Mboomba, he said: “Them *Gabonaise* be bad woman, *mpolo*, *mpolo*; him live for murder them *Orouongo*; him jealous because King Huntingdon take them *Orouongo* for him woman; him put him twist for throat of them *Orouongo* woman; them *Orouongo* woman him live for die one time; them

Gabonaise savvy law of the *Ouroungoes*; him savvy him must drink the *mboundu* for killing them *Ouroongo*; him steal for storeroom of King Huntingdon; King Huntingdon when him say he never look *Gabonaise* for him house him speak truth palaver for him mouth, for them *Gabonaise* mek *ju-ju* palaver so them white man's eyes no fit look him and him mouth no fit tell *Ouroungoes* that them women live for him house; then, when *Iguèla*, them *Mandigan*, go for storeroom for tek them ivories for *Nigeria*, them *Gabonaise* mek him all same for him neck like them *Ouroongo* — them *Mandigan* fall for floor; them *Gabonaise* thief them clothes of them *Mandigan* and him *ju-ju* Captain Hains and King Huntingdon and them *Commandant* and all them peeples that him be proper *Mandigan* and him go for *Nigeria* and him sail 'way and him now live for Libreville with him peeples!"

A nervous silence followed Sadler's declaration, the silence engendered by superstitious fear. Sadler, wise in the ways of the savages, knew there was but one way to exonerate Huntingdon and Hains and that was to play upon the superstition of the savages and lay the escape of the *Gabonaise* to *ju-ju* — to her power to assume the guise and manner of the *Mandigan*. Many a tale had the savages told Sadler of their kings and chiefs assuming the form of a beast or a bird or of an enemy and stealing among the enemy to find out what they were doing. To appear to be the *Mandigan* was therefore — in the savage opinion — not impossible to the *Gabonaise*; the *Ouroungoes* firmly believed that she really *ju-ju'd* the white men and themselves and had escaped as Sadler explained.

For the time being the escape of the *Gabonaise* was eclipsed by her manner of effecting it. The *Mandigan* had nothing to fear, he was but a tool in the hands of the powerful and cunning *Gabonaise*.

But Sadler had not yet said all he wished to say, and, midst the continued silence, he went on:

“ And them Great White King when him look them *Mandigan* for him floor, him savvy them *Gabonaise* make *ju-ju* palaver, and fear ketch him and he fall for floor and now fever ketch him skin and he be proper sick, proper sick — and now Master Sadler fit put him for bed and when him eye he open the Great White King fit for say for him mouth truth palaver all same like Master Sadler just finish tell you; and he fit *dash* all *Ouroungoes tacco* and rum, and when Chief Ragundo come the Great White King he send for Libreville and he ketch them *Gabonaise* and he *dash* them woman to Chief Ragundo! ”

“ Aye,” grunted the savages satisfied, and they left the bungalow to wait on the beach for the coming of their chief.

With the aid of the *Mandigan*, Sunlight, Mbèga, Nkömbi Kakhi, and Ogula, the shootman, Huntingdon was placed in his bed.

Inquiry was then made for Ngumbè, but he was missing. Sadler opined that Ngumbè had found his master early in the morning, and, thinking he was dead, had stolen as much of his clothing as he could carry, and had run away to the bush.

Sadler piled Huntingdon with bed covering, and, putting hot stones about him to induce warmth, sat by his side, awaiting the coming of consciousness. He was

alone, and, when hour after hour passed, and Huntingdon showed no signs of returning life, little Sadler involuntarily dropped on his knees, and for the first time since he was a lad of fourteen he begged a favor of God: he begged for the life of his friend!

Then, looking shamefacedly about him, he made sure that no one witnessed his prayer. Had a native been present, he would assuredly have murdered him!

Huntingdon's condition greatly alarmed the little skipper. He had seen much sickness in his time and he knew a grave case at sight. A nurse was needed—a civilized woman would be a God-send. But, alas, none was at hand. Still there were savage women. They at least knew how to treat fever, how to induce warmth and perspiration. Unless perspiration showed and showed quickly, Huntingdon was lost. Thought of Moore's woman came to Sadler. She knew white men's ways; he would go for her himself. He leaped down the veranda steps, just as a canoe landed on the beach and out of it stepped Madame Léon, the missionary!

He recalled then that he had passed her on *The Éclaireur* on the Ogôwe. She was *en route* to Cape Lopez to take the French steamer next day to Europe. Her husband had been dead over a year but she had remained at the mission until her husband's successor and his wife came, and, after showing them everything about the work of the mission, she was returning to Switzerland for an indefinite sojourn.

Sadler was overjoyed to see her, and, telling her of Huntingdon's danger, he led her into Huntingdon's chamber.

One glance of the woman's experienced eyes was

enough. Her duty was there, to save the life of a fellow creature.

"Mr. Sadler, will you please have all my luggage brought here? I shall not sail for Europe to-morrow."

Although older and thinner and paler, Sadler was still the boy. At the unexpected announcement and succor, he impulsively bent over and kissed Madame full on the mouth.

No blush overspread Madame's *spirituelle* face; she thoroughly understood the little skipper, and, putting her hands confidingly in his, she gently pressed them and looking steadily into his blue eyes, she said in a low voice:

"If it be God's will, you and I will nurse Mr. Huntingdon back to life and health."

With two such friends at his bedside and with Mbèga, the watchdog, in the factory, and Ogula, the shootman, and Nkombi Kakhi, his brother, on guard without, Huntingdon was indeed blessed!

At sundown Moore's *gig* sailed across the bay before a stiff breeze. The news of the tragedy had caused him to leave unfinished his work in the bush, and set out at once to see what help he could render Huntingdon. He recognized the latter's peril from the *Ouroongoes*. In their rage they might kill the white man because of the escape of the *Gabonaise*!

When Moore found Sadler and Madame Léon at Huntingdon's bedside, jealousy flared up within him, but when he heard all the facts from little Sadler, and recognized in what extreme danger Huntingdon was, Moore's better nature came forth, and he, too, offered his services.

" You can do nothing here, old man," said Sadler gratefully, " but you can do something for me — if you will? "

" Name it," cried Moore, the old bluster in his voice, but eagerness and good-fellowship in his manner.

" Huntingdon and I, dear old chap, have been pretty close to each other — I want to be on hand, if the worst comes — I want to lay him away properly — to send a cable home — to see that the *niggers* don't rob him — but, if there's a fighting chance for his life, and we'll soon know whether there is or not, I want to be on hand to help him make it — I can't stay away from Lambar-énè, there's too much business to be looked after, could you —"

" Sure I can go," Moore interrupted, " if you'll keep an eye on my place here."

" You bet I will, old man."

" Then I'll cross Yombé flats on the early morning tide with the *Oka*. But you'll keep me informed of how things're going? "

" Never fear, pard, you shall have a wire every day ; two, three, four of them, if necessary."

With his old, careless swagger Moore set out for his own bungalow. Little Sadler looked after him with tears in his eyes, and murmured, " Scratch an Englishman deep enough, and you'll find his heart."

Madame Léon spent hours on her knees praying fervently that consciousness might return to Huntingdon. Sadler nervously paced back and forth on the veranda. While Huntingdon's condition distressed him infinitely and he despaired of his life, he feared that Madame's constant kneeling and concentration in prayer

might render her ill and he would have two invalids on his hands.

In that moment he longed for the close companionship of a white woman; he fully appreciated for the first time what exile in Africa meant; what a void was in his life; what an incomplete creature a man is who is not mated to a woman of his own kind. Love for the gentle, self-sacrificing missionary woman came to him; he resolved to cast away forever his old life and to ask her to share his future. The decision could not have come to Sadler under normal conditions; for it meant a reversal of his whole life; the giving up of the absolute freedom in which he had theretofore reveled, the acceptance of service; the desertion of trade and the joining of Madame Léon in her work of the attempted salvation of the savage. That work was Madame's whole life and he would not ask her to relinquish it; she would teach him what to do and he would relieve her of the most arduous part of it. Sadler fully appreciated the derision he would have to bear from his friends but to be prayed for by a woman, to be so tenderly nursed, to be a matter of concern to her, to have her companionship, sympathy and love, were worth the sacrifice of habits no matter of what age or worth or enjoyment!

He went into the room, intending to raise her from her knees and beg her to seek rest and leave the vigil to him, when suddenly from Huntingdon's lips there rushed a flow of incoherent sentences. Silence and inertia were broken; delirium and restlessness had come. Gradually Huntingdon's speech became clear. He babbled of his life at home; his love for Marjorie; his pleading for his mother's consent to permit him to go to Africa to

engage in trade to make money for Marjorie's sake; over and over again he cried out his oath of fidelity and her pledge given in return. He lived again the long days and nights of loneliness; he spoke of the coming of the missionaries; the delight he experienced in Madame Léon's society; the regret and rage that followed the forced abandonment of further visits to the *Rest House*.

Delirium cried aloud all the suffering sanity had concealed. Again and again he repeated the litany that had supported him when endurance was all but gone; then he spoke of his illness and the coming of the *Gabonaise*; he screamed at the top of his lungs that she was naught but his nurse and whoso said she was closer to him, lied damnable; he was waiting for the mail, for Marjorie's letter; she would name their wedding day and his purgatory would end. Word for word and over and over again, he repeated Marjorie's letter; he laughed like a maniac and demanded if he were not right in disdaining a defense; he arraigned Marjorie severely for her doubt of him, then he pleaded for death and release! Then came his life with the *Gabonaise*; she brought him oblivion, she blotted out civilization and its cruelties; she brought him surcease from past tortures only to inflict deeper ones upon him!

His ravings were not consecutive but they were complete and they brought torture almost beyond endurance to Madame Léon and little Sadler.

Was there no way to bring relief to a human creature helpless in body and acutely active in mind! Oh, how Madame Léon longed for ice for the hot, throbbing head; for cooling drink for the parched throat! She

wished she had never come to Africa; that she had never met Huntingdon, such acute agony did his suffering and helplessness bring to her. Much native suffering had she relieved and, although sympathy for the sufferer was always alive within her, yet it never gripped her so vitally as did the suffering of this white man. There was a difference, a great difference. The savage was after all an alien while the white man was of her race, the tie of complexion bound them and it was a strong one.

Madame Léon could pray no more. She looked on helpless and became active again only when Ogula, the shootman, held to Huntingdon's lips a steaming draught redolent of lemon. She knew what it was: a tea made from the leaves of the lime tree. She took the tin from Ogula, and, while Sadler held the sufferer's head, she slowly fed the liquid to him.

She had her water bottles filled with water as hot as they could bear; she placed them along Huntingdon's spine and at his feet; she had her own blankets tucked tightly about him, and compresses, wrung from the only cold water at hand, that from the sea, were constantly applied to the base of his brain and about his head.

The delirium gradually passed, deep sleep and regular breathing came and perspiration deluged the sufferer. The crisis had passed! Madame Léon could again pray and thank the Giver of Life for His mercies and bless Him therefor.

When consciousness was slowly fighting for life and impressions were returning to Huntingdon, the face of the white woman bending over him was but one of the many ghosts that trooped through his disordered brain.

Gradually, she became a reality ; he knew not whom she was or whence she came ; he knew only that she was a white woman. Pleasure and gratitude lived a moment in his eyes, then were gone ; he was too weak for further emotion or expression.

As he grew stronger he studied her intently as though he had never seen a white woman ; it was but nature's way of winning him back to his own race ; then full remembrance came to him. He knew who she was ; he felt her sweet personality ; he remembered the impression she had made upon him at their first meeting, oh, so long ago ; he recalled his visits to the *Rest House*, then he flushed with shame as thoughts of the *Gabonaise* followed.

The danger passed, Sadler set out for Lambarénè and Moore came back to Cape Lopez. At night he insisted upon nursing Huntingdon while Madame Léon sought a separate room and rest. She was thoroughly exhausted and ill. But she said naught, and Moore was too much concerned about Huntingdon to take note of Madame, other than his insistence that she rest during the night and let him take her place. Moore also took complete charge of Huntingdon's house and resided there. He installed his own cook in the galley ; he had the cook teach Iguèla the proper duties of a *houseboy*. He looked in often at the factory, but he knew Mbèga was faithful and competent. Nkömbi Kakhi and Ogula took turns night and day on the front veranda keeping all disturbance from the sick man.

It was to his friends' unceasing care and vigilance that Huntingdon owed his life.

He was removed to the veranda. The sea sobbed and

moaned as of old, and the giant cocoanut-trees sighed incessantly, but Huntingdon heard only the sweet, low voice of the woman who nursed him, he was interested only in her.

She was tall, slim and graceful. In her simple gown of cool, fresh, white linen, with her soft, wavy brown hair combed from her square forehead into a knot at the base of her neck, her face and brow free of lines, and in her eyes human sympathy and understanding, she was wonderfully magnetic and attractive. She was not beautiful in the true sense of the word, and she was so *spirituelle* as to suggest frailty, but she was tremendously womanly, and her frailty masked strength and endurance. Save her continued pallor and a deeper expression in her beautiful brown eyes, she appeared no older than when Huntingdon first saw her. And she had suffered much during that period: she had gone to Europe where her child was born and died after six short weeks of life! After two years she had returned to the mission at Lambarénè and found things sadly neglected in her absence; then came her husband's lingering illness and death, and her continuance alone in her chosen work until such time as relief came.

Huntingdon fancied what she would look like in Europe where temperate breezes blow and where the sun nourishes instead of kills. With this thought in mind he abruptly asked:

“ Madame Léon, you must be pining for civilization, are you not? ”

Madame Léon smiled and playfully rebuked: “ My patient is so well now that he wishes to be rid of his nurse.”

"No, no, no!" Huntingdon hastily protested, then he added helplessly: "Why, what would I do were you to go?" and loneliness and emptiness gripped him.

"You have your work, Monsieur Huntingdon; it is only through work that we find happiness and contentment."

"Tell me, Clothilde," and Huntingdon, unconscious of the use of her first name, demanded: "are *you* happy, have *you ever been happy?*"

When human creatures are far removed from the land of their birth, when they are distant from their own kind, when they have suffered and endured and striven against almost hopeless odds, the pretenses of civilization vanish never again to return and exiles are absolutely natural.

Thus no thought of evasion came to Madame Léon, nor did she resent Huntingdon's question. She answered simply and directly:

"Yes, I have been happy."

"When?"

"Now—I'm happy, wonderfully so, because I've brought you back to life; God has answered my prayers, you will live."

At which words Huntingdon knew he loved this woman; that love for her first came into being long, long ago at the *Rest House*; he knew now why he had so vehemently resented the slander against her and the loss of her companionship; why he had acted so as to make her believe he was thoroughly bad and heartless; why he grew well; he wanted to live; to be with her always!

"Clothilde, I love you," he said simply, then gently asked: "Do you love me?"

"I love you, Cecil, very, very much," Madame Léon answered promptly.

Huntingdon did not offer to touch her, but for a long time he gazed steadily into her eyes, while in thought his unworthy life passed in review!

No rancor remained against Marjorie and the *Gabonaise*, what was done was done, but o'er Huntingdon swept the anguish that he was not good enough for the gentle woman who continued to gaze so trustfully into his eyes — he turned away; he closed his eyes that she might not see the misery within them, but love is intuitive and the woman spoke:

"The past is dead, my beloved; we grow through our sins; suffering is cleansing and purifying — we have both suffered, and we are both better and stronger for it."

Huntingdon folded her in his arms and kissed her. There was no passion in his caress; it was sweet with reverential love.

"And when shall we be married, Clothilde, *chéérie*?"

"When you will."

"And where?"

"At the mission at Lambarénè."

"All right — then here's our plans: in seven weeks the *Nigeria* and Captain Hains are due; we'll go back to Europe with him. In the meantime, you and I will go to Lambarénè and be married; Mr. Sadler and Mr. Moore shall be best men — and the wife of the missionary shall be Matron of Honor —"

"But are you strong enough, Cecil, dear?"

"I feel as though I never had an illness in my life — thanks to you —"

"But you are still weak, you can't deny that; I know you are weak."

"Yes, I'm still weak, but love and happiness are the greatest panacea in the whole world and I shall soon be well again."

And he prognosticated truly. The cold, dry season was again on, green vegetables were again plentiful, Madame Léon herself prepared the appetising dishes set three times daily on the table, and with her and Moore as companions Huntingdon was renewed both in mind and body and his illness seemed to have blotted out his past life and his sufferings. He lived only for his marriage and his return to Europe.

He set about closing up his affairs. He sent for Chief Ragundo, to whom he made ample monetary payment for the untimely loss of his granddaughter. But so little sentiment was shown by the old chief, that Huntingdon might just as well have been paying for rubber or black wood.

Huntingdon looked about for a trustworthy man to take charge of his factories. He intended to return to Africa every two years to see that all was going well with his enterprise. Perhaps he would not return at all — if he could find the right man to take his place. But telegrams throughout the bush and cables north and south along the coast brought no competent man.

Huntingdon wrote to Sadler of his betrothal to Madame Léon and begged the little skipper to act as best man along with Moore.

Keen was the blow to Sadler. Ever since his determination to ask Madame Léon to be his wife, he had lived as she would have wished him to live, he had also cabled

John Holt giving up his berth and asking that his relief be sent out at once. But so deeply did Sadler love Huntingdon that he rejoiced that Huntingdon had won Madame; he would be a more fitting husband for her; he could provide the comforts she needed and the station in life to which her sweetness, refinement and education had fitted her. He knew Huntingdon would take her from her missionary work; he was glad because he fully appreciated that Africa is no place for a white woman and that her life and health are needlessly sacrificed there. A white woman's place is in civilization where she is needed; where her work and sacrifices are appreciated and result in lasting good. Africa is savage and will ever remain so.

Infinite weariness and loneliness descended upon Sadler after Madame Léon as his future wife did not occupy his thoughts, but he immediately wired his congratulations to Huntingdon and his best wishes to Madame, telling her what a good sort Huntingdon was; that he was the only man on earth worthy of her. He ended his telegram with the words: "I'm jealous." He knew she would consider it his continued playfulness, yet it gave him the satisfaction of having expressed the first thought which had come to him on receipt of Huntingdon's letter. But not a trace of jealousy was left in the little skipper's heart. Madame would be the wife of the first human being Sadler ever loved; now he loved two persons and their happiness was his happiness, their joys his joys.

He came again to Cape Lopez with cargo. He marveled at the change both in Huntingdon and Madame. They did not look like the same creatures; even Moore

was changed. Sadler was also changed for the better. But we never see ourselves as others see us, and the first dinner the friends had together was a mutual expression of joy for the improved health and appearance of the other.

Huntingdon expressed his regret to Sadler of not being able to find anyone to take his place while he was in Europe.

“How would I do?” laughed the little skipper.

“Do! you’d be the very man, but how about Holt?”

“Oh, I resigned long ago.”

“Honest?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“My resignation went to Europe immediately after you were taken ill — perhaps my relief will be on the *Nigeria*.”

“And why did you resign, Sadler, my boy, may your old friend ask?”

“Perhaps because I was selfish and wanted a better job,” answered Sadler roguishly, keeping his secret.

“I really don’t deserve all this luck, old chap,” Huntingdon confessed. But Sadler interrupted:

“Whoso has a better right to inherit all the good things of life than Huntingdon, the Great White King. Is it not so, Madame Léon?”

Madame’s answer was a smile more expressive than any words she might have employed.

Cecil Huntingdon and Clothilde Léon were quietly married at Lambarénè, in the presence of the missionary and his wife, and Sadler and Moore. The ceremony was

at high noon and a simple wedding breakfast followed. There were no wedding gifts.

Huntingdon and his bride returned to Cape Lopez on the *Avante-Garde* and Sadler and Moore on the *Oka*.

When the *Nigeria* dropped anchor, Moore and Sadler were immediately up her ladder, giving Skipper Hains the news. Hains was delighted and he set out at once to see Huntingdon's bride and to wish them all happiness. Then at the first opportunity, he confided a secret to Huntingdon. He, too, was to be married on his arrival in Liverpool; that was his last long coast voyage; thereafter, his route would be only as far south as Sierra Leone, necessitating only two months' absence from home instead of from four to six.

'Twas Huntingdon's last day in Cape Lopez. He took Sadler into his chamber and closed the door. Sadler was now in his employ, Sadler's relief having come on the *Nigeria*.

"Sadler, old chap," Huntingdon drawled in his laziest manner, which drawl he had not employed in many a moon, "you and I've neglected to talk salary. You're Chief Agent, you know, and your salary's — £2,000 sterling, a year."

Sadler couldn't speak, he had expected only the ordinary third-term trader's salary, and he was offered a yearly stipend earned only by a few agents of twenty-five or more years' experience.

"And, Sadler, old chap," Huntingdon proceeded in a drawl more lazy than ever, "let Mbèga continue on, and, as I don't want you to have the drudgery of the factory, I'll send out an extra clerk for Cape Lopez; at Mboué, Ninga Sika and Agôuma, I'm going to make a change

from black government clerks which are up there now to Englishmen from home, so, as they come out, I wish you'd look after them, take them into the interior, get the black clerk out quietly, with proper notice of course, and show the tenderfeet what they're to do. Now I want to do something for Moore; can you suggest anything?"

"Sure," answered the little skipper, himself again because he was relieved of expressing thanks, not because he did not desire to express his appreciation of Huntingdon's generosity and the trust placed in him, but such thanks as he cared to offer would bring tears with them and Sadler wouldn't let any man see him cry. "You know, Huntingdon, that Moore's had the same old fat slob all these years; he's tired of her long ago, but it was just since your illness and since Madame Léon — oh, I beg your pardon, Great White King, since her Highness, Queen Huntingdon, came amongst us and brought us all back to decency and health and civilization, that he confided to me that he wanted to be rid of the wench and go back to civilization, but the woman's got such a hold on him that she swears she'll poison him if she even suspitions he wants to go home. You savvy what devils these nigger women are."

"I savvy," answered Huntingdon, solemnly, and that was the only discussion of black women held between the friends since the death of the *Orouongo*. "Now send Moore to me, please."

"Moore," began Huntingdon without any preliminary, and continuing in his lazy West-end drawl, "how long have you been out here?"

"Seventeen years."

“ Been home in all that time? ”

“ No.”

“ Any relatives and friends in civilization? ”

“ An old mother, and a girl left behind. Why? ”

“ Oh, Sadler and I have been palavering, that’s all. Sit down at that desk and write a cable to Hatton and Cookson resigning your berth and ask for a man to replace you to be sent out immediately! ”

“ Why, why, why — ” blustered the big Moore, but not heeding the interruption Huntingdon drawled on:

“ You can figure out exactly how long it will take your relief to get here; in the meantime softly, softly close out your affairs here; I will have cabled you in cipher what boat your man’s due on; a week before his ship docks here, you’re to set out ostensibly on your rounds in the Ogôwe, but you’re to make for Libreville where you’ll find the *Bruxellsville* with steam up ready to set out for civilization; she’ll wait for you and on her you’ll find your first class passage paid for. Go back to civilization, hunt up the girl and get married.”

“ Gad! Huntingdon, I’ve been aching to go back this long time — who told you? ”

“ Sadler — now, now, old chap, I want no thanks, just follow my instructions and that’ll be thanks enough. And, Moore,” Huntingdon continued as Moore was writing his resignation, “ I want somebody to represent me in Liverpool; d’you want the job, salary, £2,000 sterling, same as Sadler’s? ”

“ Huntingdon, I — I — ” stammered the big Moore, but Huntingdon drawled:

“ With you and little Sadler watching my interests, all I’ll have to do is to count profits — so you see, old

chap, it's mostly selfishness on my part," then he blew his whistle.

When Iguèla came, Huntingdon sent for Mbèga, Ogula, the shootman, and Nkömbi Kakhi, his brother. He questioned Mbèga first:

"What thing, Mbèga, can Master Huntingdon *dash* you before he lef' Cape Lopez?"

"£4, sterling, them money be due for my womans."

"You shall have them one time, Mbèga. Master Sadler be proper master here when I go for home and every moon Master Sadler be fit to pay you extra money."

"How much?"

"What you think?"

"Five shillings — ?"

"Five shillings it be, Mbèga, for faithful service to Master Huntingdon."

"Awaka," grinned the erstwhile *bushboy*.

Ogula, the shootman, came next.

"Ogula, what Master Huntingdon fit fer *dash* you?"

"Him magazine rifle and ammunition," answered the shootman, promptly.

"Ogula, you savvy French law be proper strict about transfer of firearms and ammunition to natives, but if them *Commandant* never give consent, then Master Huntingdon get *book* from France — savvy France, Ogula?"

"Aye, I savvy him — he be place where big French king live."

"And Ogula, besides your wages as shootman, for the rest of your life, Master Sadler fit for *dash* you for Master Huntingdon *impôt* for pay them French so's *Commandant* never put you for jail; also all the *tacco*

and cloth you and your woman personally require, and one bottle of rum every Saturday night."

"It be *dash, mpolo, mpolo*," grunted the savage.

"Now Nkömbi Kakhi?"

"You fit, O Great White King, *dash* me all same like my brudder, Ogula, the shootman?"

"I fit, proper fit, Nkömbi Kakhi. Master Sadler mek all same *dash* palaver with you as with your brudder, Ogula, the shootman."

"*Awaka*," grunted Nkömbi Kakhi, and, with the others, he disappeared to spread throughout the land the tale of the Great White King's generosity.

Iguèla begged to be permitted to return to the *Nigeria* which permission Huntingdon was glad to grant, accompanied with money, cloth, matches, tobacco and a dozen clay pipes.

The beach was crowded with natives when Huntingdon took his departure. Chief Ragundo was also there. The tragedy seemed forgotten. Once again the white man was their *Mpolo Tata Otangani* — their Great White King.

From amidships of his canoe where he was seated with his bride and Sadler and Moore, for the last time Huntingdon addressed *Orounsgoes*:

"*Mbanganè, mbanganè*.¹ Ragundo, great chief of the *Orounsgoes* and all him peeples. When moon and sun he live and die *mpolo, mpolo*, when dry and wet season he ketch *mbani, mbani*,² *Mpolo Tata Otangani* fit look Ragundo, chief of the *Orounsgoes*, and all his

¹ Good-bye.

² In two years.

peoples again and until then he wishes you all luck, *mpolo, mpolo.*¹ *Mbanganè, mbanganè.*"

"Aye, *mbanganè, Mpolo Tata Otangani, mbanganè.*"

"Aye," responded Huntingdon, solemnly, "*manganè.*"

In Sadler's *gig* were Mbèga, Ogula, the shootman, and Nkömbi Kakhi, his brother, and Chief Ragundo.

In the *Commandant's gig* with the *Commandant* were the *Douane*, LeBlanc, Wildman and Gottschalk.

As Huntingdon was about to mount the *Nigeria's* ladder, he motioned Sadler's *gig* to come alongside, then, reaching over, Huntingdon fervently wrung the hands of his faithful *serviteurs* and that of Chief Ragundo. He again assured them of his continued protection and aid through Master Sadler.

Ogula, the shootman, made answer.

"Aye, *akawa mpolo, Mpolo Tata Otangani!*"

"Aye," came the acquiescence of Nkömbi Kakhi, his brother, Mbèga and Chief Ragundo.

On the *Nigeria's* deck, champagne was drunk, good-bys repeated again and again, and mutual promises made to write to each other.

"Time's up, me lads," cried Skipper Hains, to those who were to go ashore. "If I never see ye again, take care o' ye'rsel's, and if ye have all the good luck I'm after wishin' ye, ye'll be so happy it won't be natural."

Huntingdon walked to the ladder and bade a solemn farewell to the *Commandant*, the *Douane*, LeBlanc, the Frenchman, and Wildman, the Swiss.

To one side and looking down their noses stood Sadler and Moore.

¹ Very much, or great.

Huntingdon grasped each by the hand and pressed it hard and long, but not a word did he or they speak — none was necessary.

He watched his friends descend the ladder, take their places in Sadler's *gig*, then, with his hand about his wife's waist, he waved a last farewell.

In silence Moore and Sadler were rowed to shore. In silence they stood on the beach. With heads uncovered they watched the *Nigeria* disappear on the northern horizon line.

“*Tata Otangani, mpolo, mpolo*,” murmured Ogula, the shootman, to Nkömbi Kakhi, his brother.

“Aye,” quoth Moore to Sadler, “one of nature's best. May good luck and good health come to him and his!”

But Sadler could not respond. In silence he and Moore sought their respective bungalows. But the morrow brought them together again, and, until Moore's departure for civilization — in which Sadler played a prominent part — every night found them in each other's company. Moore was a new man and in Sadler he found a staunch, sympathetic comrade. Sadler genuinely regretted Moore's departure, but the little skipper was glad that happiness had eventually come to Moore. For Sadler, there was no girl left behind; no mother waiting for or depending upon him; his place was in Africa. Huntingdon trusted him implicitly and he would fulfill that trust as long as life was left him. Madame Léon he loved in a sort of a way but all the love his great nature was capable of was given to Huntingdon that day, oh, so long ago, when Huntingdon first landed on the beach and Sadler had declared to Moore that *he was for him!* When he named Huntingdon the Great

White King he was but voicing the impression Huntingdon had made upon him. He was content in serving and in rendering a just stewardship. Huntingdon's business went on increasing and to-day he is the biggest and most successful independent white trader on the entire West Coast of Africa.

When the *Nigeria* anchored off Libreville on her return voyage up coast, the first news to reach Huntingdon was the death of the *Gabonaise*. The secret poison of the *Oroungoes* had found her out. She had suffered the atonement!

Huntingdon was surprised and delighted when Wallace boarded the *Nigeria* at Old Calabar. Smallpox had followed fever and he was badly scarred, aged and infirm. He was returning to civilization to pass the rest of his days with the family he had so ignominiously outraged. He owed their forgiveness of him to the persons he detested most: returned missionaries, who plead with his family to take him back, that his days were numbered. The old coaster showed his gratitude in a peculiar manner: he continued to gossip garrulously and maliciously of everything and everybody other than missionaries. Although he never sought their society and never entered a church at home, yet against them not a word did he utter, and when he died, the only writing he left was the request that the "sky-pilot say a prayer over his carcass, and the church choir hold song-palaver over his grave."

On the *Nigeria* he regaled Huntingdon with the gossip of the coast. He fully described the deaths of little Hertford, Longworthy and Cartwright; he opined that

the natives had secretly poisoned Captain Haywood; and Boynton, who died from drowning, had evidently tumbled into the water when he was intoxicated.

Kingsford, the last of those who had voyaged out together to Hell's Playground, was doing well. Lazy and selfish, he took excellent care of himself; to the natives he played *Legree*; they hated and feared him; to his trading firm he was invaluable and was their Chief Agent.

“After all is said and done,” remarked the old coaster in his familiar irritating drawl and with his familiar emphasis, “at home’s the place for a white man, and though he may go a-ramblin’ about the earth in his youth and madness, yet when the joints stiffen up and the step lags, he’s glad to crawl back to where he belongs and he’s sorry he ever left it—but youth is youth and ever will be youth and will ever know it all until hard knocks and inhumanity beat sense into their heads and teach them the true palaver of life.”

Lady Bedford gazed with pride upon the son who folded her in his arms at Liverpool. Cecil had always been *distingué*; it was the heritage of ancestry, but now he was truly regal. His tall form had filled out; his blond hair was gray; his eyes were bright with happiness, and he carried himself with the ease and confidence that come to a man after he has made a hard fight and won out!

As for the woman he had married, one glance of Lady Bedford’s critical eyes was enough to prognosticate the sensation her presentation at court would make. She was well worthy to be enrolled among the noble women of the families of the Bedfords, the Granvilles

and the Huntingdons. Lady Bedford embraced her and called her: "*Daughter.*" Nothing else could have pleased Huntingdon more. He knew he had chosen wisely and well.

Lord Bedford firmly grasped his son's hands and said, with admiration and pride in his low tones:

"You've won out, Cecil, my son, you've been true to the traditions of our family, and you've brought us a worthy daughter."

There were tears in Huntingdon's eyes, but they were tears of joy!

Huntingdon and his bride looked healthier than they really were. The happiness within them glowed without, sun and sea breezes had tanned their cheeks and colored them, but, alas, malaria was in their arteries, it was to torture them as long as they lived, but it did not prevent their continued happiness and coming of children.

Marjorie, the Duchess of Southland, and Huntingdon were bound to meet. She was every inch the *grande dame*. Time had dwelt gently with her and whatever her feelings were, she successfully masked them.

The Duke, her husband, was notoriously false to her, she had given him three sons and a daughter, the entail was safe, but, in their private life the Duke and Duchess were strangers to each other. Huntingdon was filled with sorrow at this knowledge, but to Clothilde alone did he express that sorrow; between him and his wife were perfect trust and confidence.

Out of Hell's Playground came some good after all!

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